SPEAK OUT

ALBERTA STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

YEAR IN REVIEW 2011–2012

Alberta Government

DISCLAIMER

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of Alberta youth we spoke to at *Speak Out* forums, at the Annual *Speak Out* Conference, and through the *Speak Out* website (www.speakout.alberta.ca) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government of Alberta.

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SPEAK OUT HIGHLIGHTS

SPEAK OUT IMPACT

This year, *Speak Out* has enabled thousands of students to share their thoughts on education through a number of formats, including the website, in-person *Speak Out* forums, the fourth Annual *Speak Out* Conference and the Minister's Student Advisory Council. Through these channels, the student voice has been sought, heard and used to inform programs and policy decisions in a number of areas within Alberta Education, with various education stakeholders and with other ministries within the Government of Alberta. Because of the connections that stakeholders are making with *Speak Out*, the student voice is impacting the following areas and initiatives in Alberta and beyond:

- Action on Wellness International Symposium
- Alberta *Education Act*
- Alberta School Councils' Association Conference and Annual General Meeting
- Alberta's 2012 Culture Forum
- Attendance Board policies
- Bullying prevention
- Canadian School Boards Association Congress
- Career and Life Management curriculum redesign
- Curriculum review and development
- Diploma examinations
- Environmental education
- Future design of school buildings
- Health and Wellness policies and practices
- High school credentials
- International education
- Rural education sustainability
- School funding
- Social policy framework for Human Services
- Teaching quality standards
- Technology in the classroom policy
- Youth health knowledge exchange

ALBERTA STUDENT ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Student engagement in Alberta continues to evolve, advancing the way Alberta Education conducts its business of teaching and learning. Various branches within Alberta Education, other ministries, school jurisdictions, teachers, parents and many others from the education community are increasingly recognizing the positive impacts that focusing on student engagement can have.

Student engagement is about collaborating with students in an effort to enhance their interest in education and their passion for learning; it is about empowering them by providing opportunities for personal achievement and to have a say in their education system.

Since November 2008, *Speak Out* – the Alberta Student Engagement Initiative has been enabling Alberta's youth to share their experiences and ideas on education to help the Ministry understand how best to meet students' varied needs, goals and learning preferences and, in turn, strengthen Alberta's education system as a whole.

Speak Out gives students ages 14 through 19 the tools they need to engage with and influence their fellow students and key education decision makers. This year, these tools included online discussion forums and blogs on the *Speak Out* website, in-person forums with the *Speak Out* team or through the DVD toolkit, the fourth Annual *Speak Out* Conference and the Minister's Student Advisory Council (the Council). Through these tools, *Speak Out* has collected valuable student feedback on dozens of priority issues in Alberta Education, such as:

- What makes a good teacher?
- What does an ideal learning environment look like?
- How do students learn at their best?
- What actions can adults or students take to improve how education looks and feels?
- What makes students feel like they belong?
- Why is technology in the classroom important?
- Why is it important to be accepting of other cultures?

This feedback is now working to inform and influence the growth and development of many Alberta Education programs and initiatives. For example, it will:

- Inform the development of wellness-related programs of study and models for delivering wellness in high schools
- Act as the student voice component of a multifaceted research report co-ordinated by Alberta Education that will examine the state of career development and financial literacy in schools across Alberta
- Lead to improvements in how Alberta Education's Attendance Board operates and help identify areas that require change
- Be used as part of the student voice component of Alberta Education's new Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying Strategy

Looking forward, *Speak Out* will continue to work closely with its student demographic and other stakeholders to further investigate the impacts of the student engagement initiative, and more specifically the student voice, which will help determine the future direction of the initiative.

As we say farewell to the 2011–2012 Council, we are thankful to them for their input throughout the past year, and we are confident and pleased that these soon-to-be alumni will continue to act as ambassadors of *Speak Out* in their schools and elsewhere in their communities. We are also excited about welcoming a new Council, who will certainly have many new ideas and perspectives on education.

SPEAK OUT WEBSITE

Speak Out's website, which includes moderated and interactive discussion boards and a daily blog, went live on November 3, 2008. Although many provinces in Canada have youth and student engagement initiatives, *Speak Out* is unique in that it is the only initiative with an interactive online presence, which allows students to discuss education issues and concerns and to brainstorm recommendations and solutions with their peers across the province. Because the website is moderated, every post is reviewed by the *Speak Out* team before it is posted to ensure relevance, privacy, anonymity and safety.

From April 1, 2011, to March 31, 2012, the *Speak Out* website had 10 monthly featured forums supported by other branches within Alberta Education, including Workforce Planning and Development, High School Attendance, Student Engagement, Capital Planning, Diploma Programs, International Education Services, Corporate Planning Branch – Getting It Right, Environmental Education, Operational Standards and the School Technology Sector.

Discussion forums included:

- So You Want to Be a Teacher?
- A Necessary Step to Your Future – Compulsory Education
- *Speak Out* Satisfaction Survey and feedback on the 2011 *Speak Out* Conference
- Designing School Facilities
- Designing the Ideal Mathematics Diploma Exam
- International Education
- *Our Children, Our Future: Getting It Right – Education Act / Exprime-toi: Viser juste – Questions concernant la Loi sur l'éducation*
- The Environment and You
- High School Diploma: What's Up With That?
- Technology in Your Learning and Life

SUMMARY OF ONLINE DISCUSSIONS

Students felt that overall, good teachers have the ability to listen, are open to new ideas, incorporate current events, admit when they are wrong, are entertaining and get to know students on a personal level. Students are most influenced by those teaching "option" classes. Students do not support strong consequences for skipping. Rather, they support making students aware of the importance of a high school diploma. The *Speak Out* team should continue advertising the initiative using social media, school assemblies, and networking with students and teachers.

Students want schools with modern architectural design, natural light, open spaces and lounge areas, wider hallways and taller ceilings, outdoor areas, and brightly painted walls; schools should be adequately sized to accommodate the student population. To be globally engaged, students need to be aware of current events and different cultures and customs, and to understand how they are interconnected with others.

Schools feel more welcoming and safe when they have comfortable environments (artwork, paint colours, common and clean spaces, outdoor curb appeal, security and timely repairs), as well as friendly people in the building. To stop bullying, schools need to create awareness of the long-term effects on students and develop a more personal and community feel among students. Students need to support anyone who is being bullied and empower others to stand up for themselves.

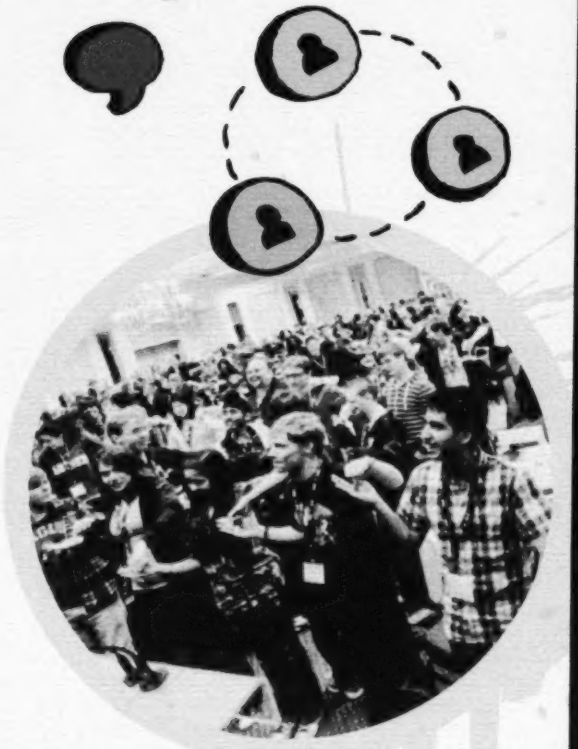
Students learn at their best through their peers, when teachers are facilitating interactive lessons, when teachers care about their students and are interested in what they teach, and when all students are given the opportunity to participate in class discussions.

Students generally support learning about the environment in specific subjects such as science or social studies, and suggest that "environmental studies" could be a fourth science. A high school diploma is critical for entering post-secondary and/or for future employment, and gives students the basic skills to succeed in the future.

Being a "digital citizen" means respecting technology, using social media safely, being part of an online community and its associated rules, taking responsibility for your actions and behaving as you would in real life.

The Open Mic / Tribune libre section provides the opportunity to debate and discuss almost anything students encounter in their education. This year, students posted comments on a variety of topics, including extracurricular activities and sports, technology, time and breaks, exams and assessment, options and languages, wellness, school environment, post-secondary and careers, school spirit, teachers and homework, and bullying.

SPEAK OUT FORUMS



Speak Out forums provide an opportunity for Alberta Education to speak directly with students about their education. Between April 2011 and March 2012, 56 forums were conducted using the *Speak Out* DVD toolkit, led by the *Speak Out* team or by students across the province. The step-by-step *Speak Out* DVD toolkit was designed to ensure any student, regardless of location, could host a *Speak Out* forum, thus enabling more students to find their voice and speak out.

Between the *Speak Out* team-led forums and student-led forums, the *Speak Out* team heard from 1,598 students, with varied backgrounds and perspectives, in 29 school districts all across the province. The forums were conducted in a variety of educational settings, including public, private, separate, francophone, charter, First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) and outreach schools. The *Speak Out* team looks for diverse perspectives and experiences, engaging youth from a range of locations and backgrounds, including rural, urban, remote, FNMI and at-risk immigrant youth.

At each forum, while working in small groups, students were asked to answer and discuss a series of questions about their educational experiences.

Students said they are learning at their best when they choose learning styles that accommodate their individual needs, are in a comfortable learning environment and take ownership of their education.

When asked what is holding them back from learning at their best, students identified distractions, both inside and outside the classroom, ineffective teaching styles and stress from feeling overwhelmed.

When asked what adults can do to improve how education looks and feels, students said adults, including parents, guardians and educators, should become involved in all aspects of their children's or students' education, teach in a way that works best for each student and create a learning environment that encourages and supports students.

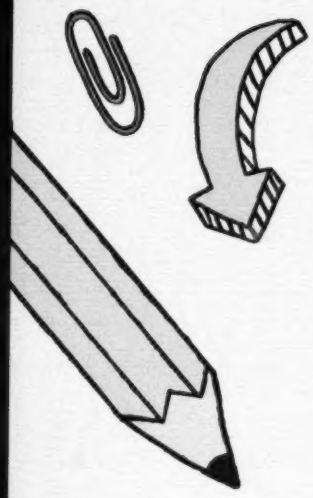
Lastly, when asked what actions students can take to improve how education looks and feels, students said they should take initiative and be responsible for their own education, maintain a positive attitude toward learning and be respectful of their peers and teachers.

Speak Out forums continue to be a platform for students in Alberta to share their thoughts on education with key decision and policy makers, and to become invested in their learning. By continuing to engage students in this unique way, Alberta Education will be better able to respond to the learning needs of students today and tomorrow.

> ***"Through hosting my forum, I have learned valuable public speaking skills that I have been able to apply to multiple aspects of my life."*** [1]

1 This report shows all quotations from participants' contributions to *Speak Out* as originally written, with no changes to spelling, grammar or punctuation.

4th ANNUAL *SPEAK OUT* CONFERENCE



On April 13–15, 2012, hundreds of students from around Alberta, ages 14 to19, and their chaperones attended the fourth Annual *Speak Out* Conference in Edmonton. Hosted by the Council, the *Speak Out* Conference gave students and chaperones an opportunity to explore key issues and initiatives related to the province's education system, and to connect with Alberta Education representatives and other students with similar interests and aspirations. The event included inspiring keynote speeches, engaging breakout workshops for both students and chaperones, networking opportunities for students and chaperones, music and dance performances by local artists, a dance party and much more.

A total of 245 students and 103 chaperones from 54 communities around Alberta, as well as 55 Alberta Education staff, participated in the conference.

In preparation for the conference, *Speak Out* worked closely with other Alberta Education staff and members of the Council to develop nine workshop themes for students and five workshop themes for chaperones. The themes were chosen based on student feedback collected by *Speak Out* through the website, the forums and the Council over the past year. Below are some highlights from what we heard during the workshops. For detailed summaries, please see the Conference section on page 31.

- Healthy students feel healthy inside and out. They have the confidence to succeed, the support to make healthy choices and the attitude, skills and knowledge to be successful after high school.
- Students and teachers both have to put in effort to make learning fun and engaging.
- Career planning is important at the current stage in their lives, and it is valuable in preparing them for the transition to life after high school. Students believe they hold a "great deal" of personal responsibility for guiding their career planning.
- The Attendance Board is necessary, and some positive ways to create an environment where students want to go to school include innovative teaching, technology in the classroom, passionate teachers, extracurricular activities and incentives.
- Technologies such as laptops, tablets and smartphones are widely adopted, and many students already own and use personally owned devices (PODs) outside of school. There is a significant opportunity to adopt PODs as mainstream learning tools inside and outside the classroom.
- Strategies for preventing or putting an end to bullying could include building students' confidence in themselves and instilling in them a sense of respect for others beginning from a very young age, organizing school spirit events and providing adequate opportunities for students to participate in extracurricular activities, and raising awareness of bullying and its consequences.
- Benefits to having diploma exams in Alberta include preparing students for the future by having them deal with stress (which everyone will face in the "real world"), holding teachers to a high standard and helping maintain Alberta's strong reputation in education. However, there are also drawbacks to diploma exams; the most widely voiced drawback was the sheer amount of stress they put on students.
- When it comes to international education, it is important to go further than just learning about other countries, cultures and religions in social studies or religious studies.
- Although school boards currently attempt to provide optional programming to meet the needs of the majority of students, a minority of students are missing out on various opportunities because school boards are unable to provide the desired variety of programming.
- Focusing more on competencies and skill development—as described in the *Framework for Student Learning: Competencies for Engaged Thinkers and Ethical Citizens With an Entrepreneurial Spirit*—and giving students more freedom to choose how they wish to learn would put them in a better position to actively engage in their learning.

- In order for parents, educators and community leaders to gain a greater awareness and appreciation for First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) perspectives, they must first learn and understand Aboriginal world views.

- Parents and educators received a tour of the online resource for parents My Child's Learning: A Parent Resource. Participants look forward to using and sharing the resource with others.

- Students need opportunities to explore and understand diversity.

- The development, dissemination and use of research to improve education will contribute to a forward-thinking and adaptive education system.

The *Speak Out* Conference was a great success. Over 90 per cent of delegates said they felt confident their input during the sessions will be considered, and *Speak Out* is pleased to confirm that their feedback will play an important role in the continual growth and improvement of education in Alberta.

Not only was the *Speak Out* team able to collect essential feedback from students, teachers, parents and other members from the education community, but it was also able to provide these delegates with valuable information on a number of Alberta Education programs and initiatives. *Speak Out* was delighted to learn that over 90 per cent of the delegates said they were glad they participated in the conference, and *Speak Out*'s members look forward to engaging with these students and chaperones again at next year's conference in April 2013.

MINISTER'S STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

The 2011–2012 Council consisted of 24 members, between the ages of 14 and 19. Council members acted as ambassadors of *Speak Out* and representatives of the student voice within their schools and communities and elsewhere across the province, including at various meetings and conferences. Council members' roles also included active participation in various communications on the interactive *Speak Out* website, hosting at least one *Speak Out* forum using the DVD toolkit, meetings with the Minister of Education to share outcomes of their *Speak Out* forums and their perspectives on education in general, and hosting the fourth Annual *Speak Out* Conference.

Council members were selected in part based on the diversity of their backgrounds, opinions, perspectives and experiences, as described in their written application forms. Members were appointed to serve a one-year term, which started in July.

Students are the largest and one of the most valued stakeholder groups in education. Other stakeholders, including other Alberta Education program areas or other ministries, are quickly recognizing the significance of involving students in the advancement of their own projects and initiatives. Some of the areas where feedback has been gathered to date include designing school buildings for the future, redesigning curriculum and encouraging fellow students to make healthy choices. Many program areas and education stakeholders have integrated student feedback into reports and recommendations, which are being reviewed by key decision and policy makers from across the province. This feedback will be used to inform, and help shape the development of, a range of education programs and initiatives.

The Council was invited to participate in many events in a variety of roles throughout the year. They participated in a number of small group and online discussions, presented information on youth perspective through panel presentations, sat as youth representatives on various provincial committees and co-hosted major consultation sessions, including the *Our Children, Our Future: Getting It Right* public consultations. The Council also met with key contacts and Ministry of Education stakeholders, including representatives from the Diploma Program and Attendance Board branches, and represented the student voice in a number of other important events and initiatives. For a list of these events, please refer to the Minister's Student Advisory Council section on pages 53 – 60.

The Council also has a growing body of strong alumni who act as unofficial ambassadors of *Speak Out* and continue to be passionate about sharing the student voice. Many alumni were actively engaged with the Council and *Speak Out* throughout the year.

Speak Out is proud of the 2011–2012 Council. Their passion and dedication to improving education have enabled the student voice to be heard this year more than ever before in Alberta. Council members have been strong representatives and supporters of *Speak Out*'s main objective: to seek and share the student voice in an effort to continually advance education in Alberta.

THE WEBSITE

VISIT SPEAKOUT.ALBERTA.CA

THE WEBSITE

Speak Out's website, which includes moderated and interactive discussion boards and a daily blog, went live on November 3, 2008. Although many provinces in Canada have youth and student engagement initiatives, *Speak Out* is unique in that it is the only youth initiative with an interactive online presence, which allows students to discuss education issues and concerns and to brainstorm recommendations and solutions with their peers across the province. Because the website is moderated, every post is reviewed by human eyes before it is posted to ensure relevance, privacy, anonymity and safety.

WHAT HAPPENED

The *Speak Out* website features a daily blog, student-generated discussion boards, information on the Annual *Speak Out* Conference and the Minister's Student Advisory Council, summaries of each *Speak Out* forum, weekly poll questions, and information on contests and sponsors. The "Discuss" page allows students to create their own discussion topics, view the archive of discussion posts and respond to ongoing conversations. The discussion section is divided into several "forums" created by the *Speak Out* team, including monthly forums that feature various themes. When students register on the website, they can create a personal profile, complete with an avatar and a signature sign-off. Registered members can then create their own topics under the forums to chat with other students across Alberta about their school experiences and their education.

OUR COMMUNITY RULES ARE:

- Keep it relevant
- Keep it respectful
- Keep it safe (no names, no places, no schools, no contact info, no URLs)
- Keep an open mind
- Keep it clean

FEATURED FORUMS

From April 1, 2011, to March 31, 2012, the *Speak Out* website had 10 monthly featured forums supported by other branches within Alberta Education:

DATE	FEATURED FORUM	HOSTED BY
April 2011	So You Want to Be a Teacher?	Workforce Planning and Development
May 2011	A Necessary Step to Your Future – Compulsory Education	School Accreditation and Disputes Resolution
June 2011	*Speak Out* Satisfaction Survey	Student Engagement
September 2011	Designing School Facilities	Capital Planning
October 2011	Design the Ideal Mathematics Diploma Exam	Diploma Programs
November 2011	International Education	International Education Services
December 2011	*Our Children, Our Future: Getting It Right – Education Act*	International Education Services
January 2011	*Our Children, Our Future: Getting It Right – Education Act*	Environmental Education
February 2011	*Our Children, Our Future: Getting It Right – Education Act*	Environmental Education
March 2012	Technology in Your Learning and Life	Environmental Education

ADDITIONAL FEEDBACK WAS COLLECTED ON:

2011 *Speak Out* Conference
Exprime-toi: Viser juste – Questions concernant la Loi sur l'éducation
Open Mic / Tribune libre

The following is a summary of the major themes discussed in the general discussion and featured forums.

> *"Teachers are not necessarily expected to have all the answers but instead to teach students how to find the answer themselves."* [1]

SO YOU WANT TO BE A TEACHER?

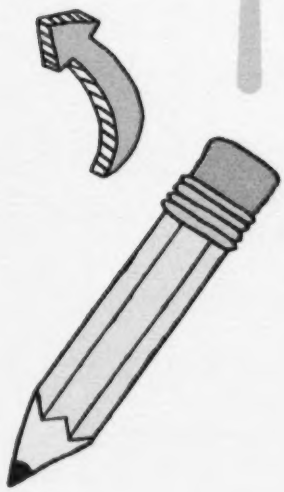
+ Good teachers balance curriculum and additional learning, listen, are open to new ideas, incorporate current events, admit when they are wrong, entertain and get to know students on a personal level.
+ Students are most influenced by those teaching "option" classes, and are not necessarily supportive of provincial achievement tests as a way to evaluate teachers.

A NECESSARY STEP TO YOUR FUTURE – COMPULSORY EDUCATION

+ Excessive skipping of school can lead to dropping out.
+ Students skip because they do not feel a connection to their schooling; they are bored or learn independently.
+ Students do not support strong consequences for skipping. Rather, they support making students aware of the importance of a high school diploma.
+ Students who skip school are most affected by their choice to skip; classmates and partners are also affected.
+ There is a correlation between students' attitude at school and other things they do in life.

SPEAK OUT SATISFACTION SURVEY

- The *Speak Out* team should continue advertising the initiative using social media, school assemblies and school visits to make students and teachers aware.
- The team should continue to use forums where students feel comfortable voicing their opinions.
- The team should continue demonstrating how powerful the student voice can be in influencing decisions.
- Students are motivated to voice their opinions when they feel personally comfortable and when friends are involved.



DESIGNING SCHOOL FACILITIES

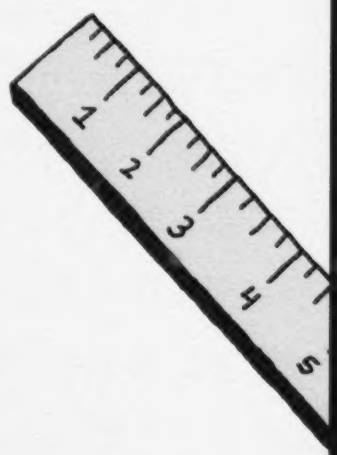
- Students want schools with modern architectural design, natural light, open spaces and lounge areas, wider hallways and taller ceilings, outdoor areas and brightly painted walls.
- Classrooms should be equipped with new technology, have good ventilation, be arranged according to subject, and position desks to ensure the most comfortable and productive workspace possible.
- Schools and classrooms need to adequately accommodate the size of the student population.

DESIGN THE IDEAL MATHEMATICS DIPLOMA EXAM

- Diploma exams are too heavily weighted at 50 per cent.
- Students support having approximately 50 questions and keeping the pass rate at 50 per cent.
- Diplomas should include a variety of question types. Students strongly support multiple choice questions.
- Two to three hours is considered a reasonable time to complete a diploma exam. Students who require additional time, an exam reader or a modified exam environment should be accommodated.
- The test environment (room, lighting, temperature) is perceived to have an effect on exam performance; distractions during exams should be limited.
- Students support multiple streams of math, pure and applied, but have mixed views on whether or not the math curriculum provides students with necessary life skills.

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

- Being "globally engaged" means being aware of what is going on in the world around you and connecting with people around the world; it doesn't necessarily mean travelling. To be globally engaged, you need to be aware of current events and issues, different cultures and customs, and ways you are interconnected with others.
- To get involved, schools or students can sponsor annual international trips and exchanges, host foster children and mission trips, fundraise or volunteer for international aid organizations, and promote clubs and international studies.
- Being a "global citizen" means taking a broader view, being interested, being involved, staying current and participating!
- Global activities are very important—they open students' minds to the privileges they have in Canada and the future of globalization.
- To live globally, students require tact and diplomacy, as well as technological, communication, language, simple mathematical, critical thinking and social skills.

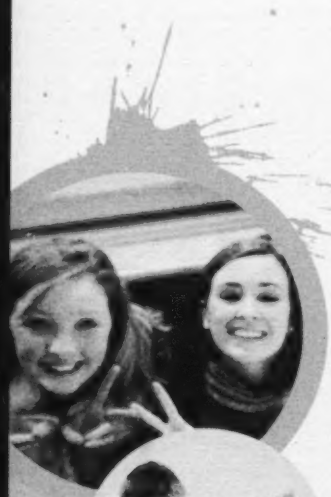


> ***"My school is an International Baccalaureate (IB) world school... the very essence of an 'international education.'"***

1 This report shows all quotations from participants' contributions to *Speak Out* as originally written, with no changes to spelling, grammar or punctuation.

OUR CHILDREN, OUR FUTURE: GETTING IT RIGHT – EDUCATION ACT

- Schools feel more welcoming and safe when they have comfortable environments (artwork, paint colours, common and clean spaces, outdoor curb appeal, security and timely repairs), as well as friendly people in the building (someone to provide directions, a welcoming committee or a sense of school spirit).
- To stop bullying, we need to create awareness of the long-term effects on students, develop a more personal/community feeling among students, support anyone who is being bullied and empower others to stand up to bullying. Students support a strict no-tolerance anti-bullying policy.
- To help students complete high school, schools need to foster interesting and engaging activities and demonstrate how high school learning can be applied in real life. They need to proactively reach out to students at risk, identify the issues limiting their participation at school and provide the necessary supports. Schools should encourage programs like Work Experience and Registered Apprenticeship Programs.
- Students need critical-thinking, problem-solving, life, social and financial skills, as well as a proper work ethic to succeed after high school.
- Students learn at their best when there is a comfortable work environment and when teachers are passionate, care about their students, accommodate various learning skills and support students when needed.



"Sure the aesthetics of the school affect how we perceive it, but ultimately it's the staff and the students that create the atmosphere."

THE ENVIRONMENT AND YOU

- Inspiration to get involved in environmental action includes visible pollution, various environment movies and activists, love for the outdoors and awareness of the consequences of current actions on future generations.
- Students generally support learning about the environment in specific subjects, such as science or social studies; they suggest that environmental studies could be a fourth science.
- Nature is the "natural way" things are supposed to be, not created by humans.
- Environment means our surroundings or the conditions in which we live.
- To influence environmental change in Alberta, students can make individual contributions to reduce environmental impacts, and organize student groups to raise awareness.

HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA: WHAT'S UP WITH THAT?

- A high school diploma demonstrates an equitable standard for all students in the province, and can reasonably be achieved through the 100-credit requirement.
- A high school diploma is critical for entering post-secondary and for future employment.
- A diploma gives you the basic skills to succeed in the future.

TECHNOLOGY IN YOUR LEARNING AND LIFE

- Technology can be used to do research, make presentations and videos, write reports/essays/notes, listen to music, access websites and email, collaborate with other students and access courses (distance learning or full-time online).
- Smartphones can be used in classes to view presentations, use the calculator or calendar, search the Internet for information, receive email on assignments, participate in a class discussion and capture pictures of lecture notes.
- Being a "digital citizen" means respecting technology, using social media safely, being part of an online community and its associated rules, taking responsibility for your actions and behaving as you would in real life.

SPEAK OUT SATISFACTION SURVEY

2011 *Speak Out* Conference Feedback

+ The 2011 *Speak Out* Conference sessions were interesting, informative, interactive and fun.

EXPRIME-TOI : VISER JUSTE – QUESTIONS CONCERNANT LA LOI SUR L'ÉDUCATION

+ Les écoles semblent plus accueillantes et plus sécuritaires quand les bureaux de l'administration se trouvent près de l'entrée principale de sorte à permettre au personnel de diriger les visiteurs, et quand les élèves sont aimables entre eux et envers les adultes. *Schools feel more welcome and safe when administration is close to the main entrance to provide directions to visitors, and when students are friendly to one another and to adults.*

+ Afin d'inciter les élèves à terminer leurs études secondaires, les écoles doivent leur montrer que l'éducation constitue un investissement pour l'avenir et du temps bien utilisé. *To assist students in completing high school, schools need to demonstrate how education is an investment and a valuable use of time.*

+ Pour assurer leur réussite postsecondaire, les élèves doivent bénéficier d'une éducation visuelle, de temps pour se préparer, de l'aide de leur famille, d'une concentration sur les matières à maîtriser pour leur carrière et d'une formation en la préparation de leur curriculum vitae. *In order to succeed after high school, students need visual education, time to prepare, family supports, focus on subjects that apply to their future careers and instruction on how to write a resumé.*

+ Les élèves apprennent le mieux de leurs pairs, lors de leçons interactives facilitées par des enseignants qui s'intéressent à eux et à leurs études, et quand tous les élèves ont l'occasion de participer aux discussions de classe. *Students learn at their best through their peers, when teachers are facilitating interactive lessons, when teachers care about their students and are interested in what they teach, and when all students are given the opportunity to participate in class discussions.*

OPEN MIC / TRIBUNE LIBRE

+ The Open Mic / Tribune libre section provides the opportunity to debate and discuss almost anything students encounter in their education.

+ This year, students posted comments on a variety of topics, including:

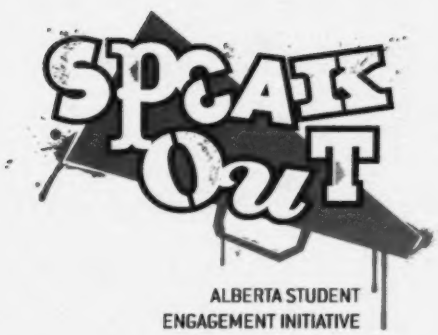
  + Extra-curricular activities and sports
  + Technology
  + Time and breaks
  + Exams and assessment
  + Options and languages
  + Wellness
  + School environment
  + Post-secondary and careers
  + School spirit
  + Teachers and homework
  + Bullying

> ***"I think students get enough time to do homework if they use their time wisely at school and at home."***

HOW WE DID

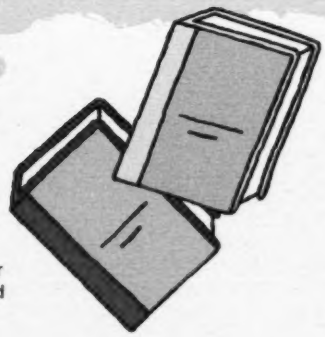
At the end of the school year, we surveyed users, asking for feedback on the *Speak Out* website. Selected responses are listed below:

+ **94% of respondents said that the website was easy to navigate.**
+ **94% of respondents felt free to express themselves and their perspectives on the website.**
+ **88% felt that their input on the website was useful to Alberta Education.**
+ **Participation in the online discussions increased over 300% since March 2011. As of March 2012, the *Speak Out* website had a total of 2,673 users, 935 topics and 21,310 posts.**
+ **According to Google statistics, in March 2012 alone, the *Speak Out* website was visited 4,172 times from 728 cities worldwide.**


SPEAK
Out
ALBERTA STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

SPEAK OUT FORUMS

SPEAK OUT FORUMS



Alberta Education has now completed its fourth year of *Speak Out* forums. *Speak Out* forums provide an opportunity for Alberta Education to speak directly with students about their education. This year, all *Speak Out* forums were conducted using the *Speak Out* DVD toolkit and were led by the *Speak Out* team or by students across the province.

The step-by-step *Speak Out* DVD toolkit was designed to ensure that anyone, at any time and in any place, could host a *Speak Out* forum. By using this approach, the *Speak Out* team has not only built local capacity and local engagement, but it has also enabled more students to find their voice and speak out.

Between April 1, 2011, and March 31, 2012, 1,598 students in 29 of the 62 school districts participated in a *Speak Out* forum. The forums were conducted in all varieties of educational systems in Alberta, including public, private, separate, francophone, charter, First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) and outreach schools. The *Speak Out* team continues to look for diverse perspectives and experiences by engaging rural, urban, remote, FNMI and at-risk immigrant youth across Alberta.

At each *Speak Out* forum, students were split into small working groups to discuss their educational experiences. They were asked to share on the following:

- What does it look like when you are learning at your best?
- What is holding you back from learning at your best?
- What actions can adults take to improve how education looks and feels?
- What actions can students take to improve how education looks and feels?

At the *Speak Out* forums, students said they are learning at their best, when they choose the learning styles that work best for them, are in a comfortable learning environment and take ownership of their education.

When asked what is holding them back from learning at their best, students said distractions (both inside and outside the classroom), ineffective teaching styles and stress from feeling overwhelmed.

When asked what adults can do to improve how education looks and feels, students said parents, guardians and educators should become involved in all aspects of their education, teach in a way that works best for each student and create a learning environment that encourages and supports students.

Lastly, when asked what actions students can take to improve how education looks and feels, students said they should take initiative and be responsible for their own education, maintain a positive attitude toward learning and be respectful to their peers and teachers.

The *Speak Out* forums continue to be a platform for students to have their voices heard by key decision and policy makers. By continuing to seek out the student voice, Alberta Education will be better able to respond to the learning needs of students.

> ***"Hosting a forum allows other students to Speak Out freely, honestly, and anonymously about issues that directly affect them."*** [1]

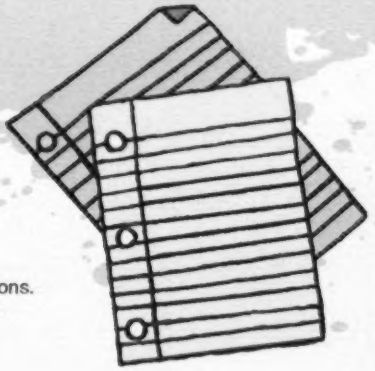
1 All quotations from participants' contributions to *Speak Out* are shown as originally written, with no changes to spelling, grammar or punctuation.

ALBERTA STUDENT ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

The locations for the *Speak Out* forums, held between April 1, 2011, and March 31, 2012, are listed below. For an in-depth *Speak Out* forum schedule, please see Appendix A.

- Airdrie
- Ardrossan
- Arrowwood
- Barons
- Bashaw
- Brant
- Calgary (10)
- Champion (2)
- Coalhurst
- Cochrane
- Edmonton (4)
- Edson
- Fort McMurray
- Grande Prairie
- Grimshaw
- Hanna
- High Level
- Iron Springs
- Jasper
- Kinuso
- Leduc
- Legal
- Lethbridge (2)
- Lloydminster (2)
- Medicine Hat
- Milo
- Nobleford
- Picture Butte
- Ponoka
- Redwater
- Rocky Mountain House (2)
- Sexsmith
- Sherwood Park
- Spruce Grove
- Stettler
- Stony Plain
- Tilley
- Vulcan

WHO WE SPOKE TO



At the beginning of each DVD toolkit *Speak Out* forum, students were asked a series of "getting to know you" questions. To collect this information, each student was asked to fill out a student information questionnaire titled "Who's in the Room?" The following data is based on the average responses collected from each of the 1,598 students who participated in the *Speak Out* forums.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1) I am a...

Guy	47%
Girl	53%

2) I am in Grade...

9	43%
10	22%
11	15%
12	11%
Other	9%

3) I'm on Facebook, MySpace or Twitter.

Yes	89%
No	11%

4) I have (#) people listed as friends or contacts on these social networking sites.

None	11%
1–99	11%
100–249	32%
250–499	33%
500 or more	13%

5) I usually do about (#) hours of homework on an average night.

0	25%
1	51%
2	18%
3	4%
4 or more	2%

6) I am involved in...
(students selected top two answers)

Fine arts	23%
School clubs	15%
Sports team	43%
Leadership	16%
Yearbook	3%

7) I am physically active
(work out, play on a sports team, etc.).

Yes	84%
No	16%

8) I volunteer.

Yes	62%
No	38%

9) I have a part-time job.

Yes	38%
No	62%

10) At my part-time job, I work about (#) hours each week.

0	62%
1–10	20%
11–20	11%
21–30	5%
31 or more	2%

11) I usually get (#) hours of sleep on an average night.

Less than 5	6%
5	6%
6	16%
7	32%
8	28%
More than 8	12%

12) I speak a second language.

Yes	38%
No	62%

13) I go to school each day because...
(students selected top two answers)

I enjoy it	8%
My parents make me	10%
Of my friends	14%
There's nothing else to do	4%
I want to get skills for a job	11%
I want to get my high school diploma	15%
I want to stay out of trouble	3%
Of what I learn in classes	5%
Extracurricular activities (sports, clubs, music, etc.)	8%
I want to go to college or university	22%

14) How do you learn best?
(students selected top two answers)

By listening	12%
By seeing	21%
By doing	30%
By working with others	14%
By working independently	14%
By using technology	9%

"Hosting a forum allows me to hear what students from all demographics have to say and actually do something about it."

WHAT HAPPENED

In preparation for each *Speak Out* forum, the *Speak Out* team worked with the leadership of each school to ensure that a diverse student population would participate in the session. Participants included students who represented the voices of all provincial youth, from all different backgrounds—those who excel in school, struggle in school, love sports, love the arts, and so forth.

At the beginning of each *Speak Out* forum, an overview of *Speak Out* – the Alberta Student Engagement Initiative was provided. Students were then separated into working groups with one leader at each table. The table leaders helped the groups stay on task, facilitated discussions and captured ideas.

Throughout each forum, activities and games were used to help build team spirit and camaraderie. The purpose of these team-building activities was to enable students to be more open and direct when sharing their thoughts and ideas for each discussion question.

> ***"Through hosting my forum, I have learned skills on teaching and working with my peers. It's so neat to see the discussions on education grow and develop into these fantastic ideas that eventually will become ready in Alberta Ed."***

THE FACILITATION PROCESS

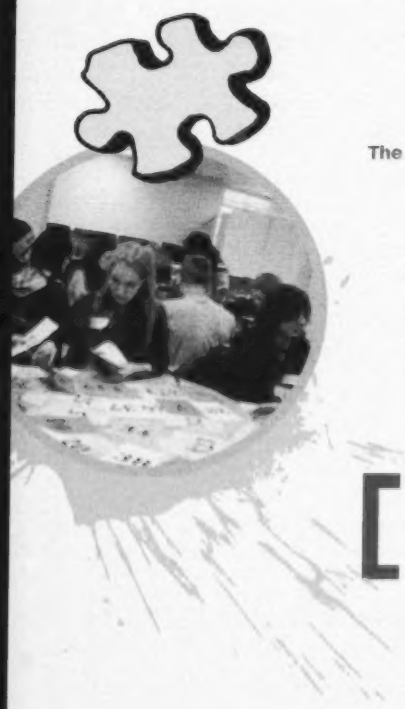
The *Speak Out* forum process included individual and group brainstorming, clustering of similar ideas, theming and voting. Small working groups of up to 10 students were formed for the graphic facilitation process. Through the process, the groups easily captured their responses to each question.

The participants were asked to respond to the following four questions:

- What does it look like when you are learning at your best?
- What is holding you back from learning at your best?
- What actions can adults take to improve how education looks and feels?
- What actions can students take to improve how education looks and feels?

The facilitation process involved the following steps:

- Individual brainstorming: Each student came up with several ideas and wrote one idea per sticky note.
- Group brainstorming: In individual working groups, each participant shared his or her two or three most important ideas. Together, the group discussed each idea.
- Clustering ideas: The working group clustered similar thoughts together.
- Naming the clusters: The group named each cluster by its main idea or theme.
- Identifying two themes: Each group chose their top two themes to be shared and posted by the group at large.
- Forum group voting: Participants voted on all the themes, choosing the two ideas that they saw as most important.



> ***"Hosting a forum allows me to engage students in my school and begin the discussion between our school's administration and students."***

WHAT WE HEARD

This section summarizes the top student responses to the questions asked during each of the 56 *Speak Out* forums. The purpose of each question was to identify the conditions and tools required for optimal learning. Students were encouraged to consider their answers to each question from a holistic learning perspective, meaning that they were encouraged to think beyond classroom learning.

The following diagrams and tables summarize the general themes that consistently arose from each *Speak Out* forum, including the percentage of student votes each response received. The subsequent tables provide more detailed explanations.

> ***"Through hosting my forum, I have learned that everyone from every grade, social group, and classroom does have a lot to say about changes they think could be made in their school!"***

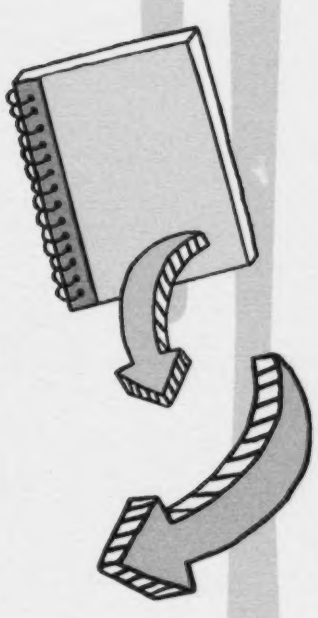
QUESTION ONE: WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE WHEN YOU ARE LEARNING AT YOUR BEST?

The purpose of this question was to identify the conditions and tools that students feel are important for optimal learning. Students were encouraged to consider how they learn best, both inside and outside of school. The themes presented below were the top responses; they include a breakdown of the number of students who voted for each theme. Detailed information can be found in the subsequent table.

THEME	EXAMPLES OF THE STUDENT VOICE: WHEN STUDENTS ARE LEARNING AT THEIR BEST *
Able to choose learning styles that are best for me (22%)	+ Hands-on experiments or projects + Working in groups + Interactive class discussions + Working independently at my own pace + Different resources and tools
A comfortable learning environment (20%)	+ Smaller class sizes + No distractions + Working in a quiet classroom + Listening to music + Safe and calm surroundings + Learning in a friendly, enthusiastic environment
A positive learning experience (16%)	+ On-task, prepared and motivated + Feeling focused and ready to learn + Understanding what is being taught + Having fun while learning + Engaging in discussions with peers and teachers + Feeling confident and successful
Teachers who care about my success (12%)	+ Teachers who go above and beyond + Knowledgeable and passionate teachers + Addressing different learning styles in the classroom + Extra time for one-on-one help + Lessons and homework are fully explained
I like what I am learning (11%)	+ Being interested, enthusiastic and engaged in school + Feeling happy, passionate and motivated about a topic + Participate in discussions with peers and teachers
Positive student-teacher interactions (6%)	+ Feeling comfortable to ask questions + Listening to students' opinions + In-depth discussions that are constructive + Class discussions are encouraged + Teachers who relate to and understand students
Leading and being responsible for my education (5%)	+ Stress-free and relaxed + Being well rested and eating a healthy diet + No peer pressure + Enjoy being at school
Positive state of body and mind (5%)	+ Working hard and being productive + Being organized and ready to learn + Having good time management skills + Taking responsibility for my actions
Using up-to-date resources and technology (3%)	+ Technology is available in the classroom + Lessons that have hands-on demonstrations

* These themes are taken directly from student input and are listed in order of importance as ranked by students.

> ***"Hosting a forum allows other students to realize that they have a voice, and that there are people out there that are willing to listen."***



QUESTION TWO: WHAT IS HOLDING YOU BACK FROM LEARNING AT YOUR BEST?

The purpose of this question was to have students reflect on the boundaries or limitations that prevent them from learning at their best. Students were encouraged to think of what holds them back from optimal learning. The themes presented below were the top responses; they include a breakdown of the number of students who voted for each theme. Detailed information can be found in the subsequent table.

THEME	EXAMPLES OF THE STUDENT VOICE: WHEN STUDENTS ARE HELD BACK FROM LEARNING AT THEIR BEST *
Distractions (26%)	+ Peers who are loud and disrespectful, both in and out of the classroom + Drama and rumours from others + Home/personal life + Access to technology for social networking
Ineffective teaching styles (26%)	+ Not addressing different learning styles + Material is presented in a boring way + Teachers who are unclear when teaching lessons and giving homework + Not using class time effectively + Teachers who lack knowledge and experience in a subject area + Uninterested, unenthusiastic, disengaged teachers
Stress (18%)	+ Not having enough time to complete homework and assignments + Feeling overwhelmed from demands of school and personal life + Expectations are too high + Feeling pressure from heavily weighted exams + Experiencing problems in personal lives + Having ineffective time management skills
Poor student-teacher relationships (6%)	+ Treating students unequally + Having limited interaction with students + Teachers and students who are uninvolved in class + Feeling intimidated to share in the classroom
Not interested in the curriculum (6%)	+ Feeling bored with or uninterested in a subject + Topics that seem irrelevant to the real world + Classes that are not up to students' expectations
Lack of involvement and support from adults (5%)	+ A lack of engagement and passion about students' progress + Apathy of adults + Adults who don't help set goals and expectations
Lack of self-motivation and discipline (4%)	+ Procrastinating from a lack of interest + Not being prepared to learn + Being easily distracted + Students who don't work to their full potential

* These themes are taken directly from student input and are listed in order of importance as ranked by students.

Continued on Page 25...

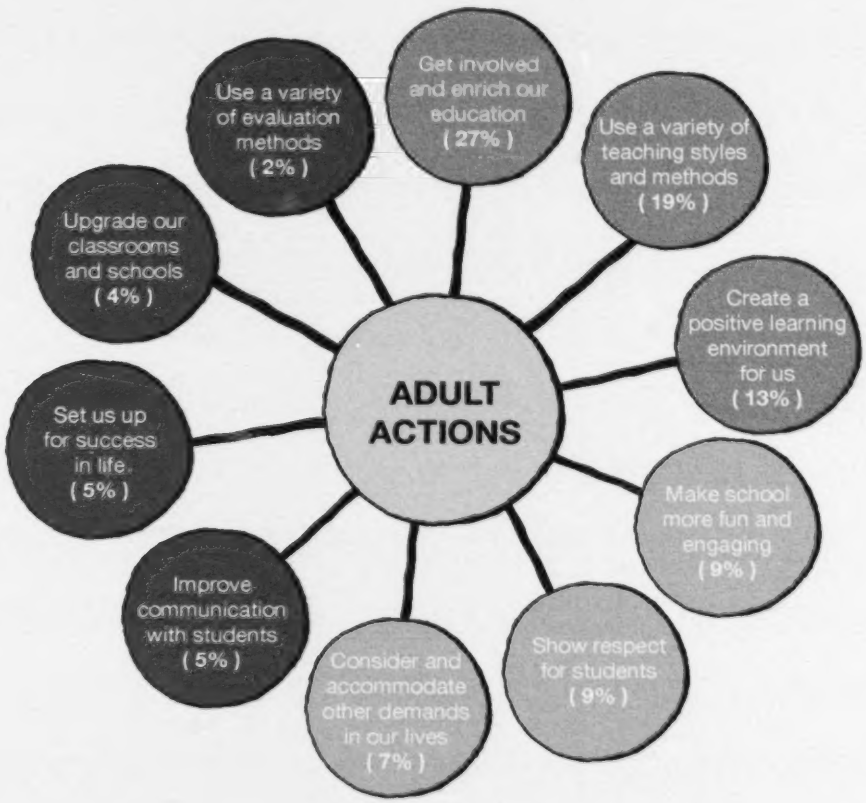
"Hosting a forum allows other students to get a taste of Speak Out, and the initiative as well as have the opportunity to express their thoughts and opinions to maintain the student voice in their school and government."

THEME	EXAMPLES OF THE STUDENT VOICE: WHEN STUDENTS ARE HELD BACK FROM LEARNING AT THEIR BEST *
Lack of up-to-date resources and technology (3%)	+ Using technology that is outdated and limited + Having a lack of resources for options (sports, fine arts, music, etc.)
Peer pressure and bullying (3%)	+ Having negative relationships with peers + Feeling pressure to get involved in drugs and alcohol + Facing racism and discrimination
Poor health (3%)	+ Not having enough sleep + Not eating a healthy diet + Substance abuse

* These themes are taken directly from student input and are listed in order of importance as ranked by students.

QUESTION THREE: WHAT ACTIONS CAN ADULTS TAKE TO IMPROVE HOW EDUCATION LOOKS AND FEELS?

The purpose of this question was to allow students to be creative and provide solutions or strategies that adults could undertake to overcome the obstacles, boundaries or limitations identified in the second question (What is holding you back from learning at your best?). Students were asked to provide as many solutions as possible. The themes presented below are taken directly from input provided by students during the *Speak Out* forums; they include a breakdown of the number of the students who voted for each theme. Detailed information can be found in the subsequent table.

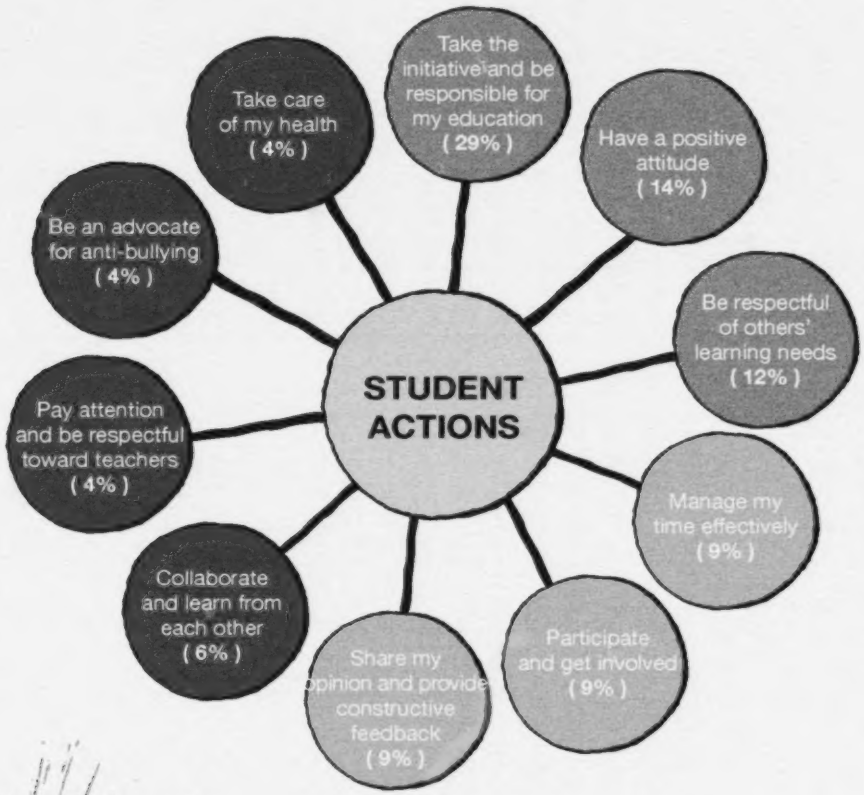


THEME	EXAMPLES OF THE STUDENT VOICE: STUDENT SUGGESTIONS FOR ADULT ACTIONS *
Get involved and enrich our education (27%)	+ Encouraging and supporting students in learning new material and concepts + Being more interested in students' education + Listening to issues and concerns that students have + Teachers who provide extra time to help students + Helping students manage stress and pressure
Use a variety of teaching styles and methods (19%)	+ Having more hands-on activities + Making an effort to plan interesting and fun lessons + Offering additional help sessions for students + Taking more time to explain new concepts + Better management of the classroom
Create a positive learning environment for us (13%)	+ Having smaller class sizes so students get more individual help + Being supportive, encouraging and motivating every day + Providing more choices for students + Recognizing and celebrating students' success + Providing constructive criticism to help students progress + Classrooms that are more welcoming and exciting
Make school more fun and engaging (9%)	+ Having lessons that are more interactive and interesting + Providing more learning outside the classroom + Making lessons relevant to students' lives
Show respect for students (9%)	+ Being helpful when students don't understand + Ensuring equality in the classroom + Showing compassion for daily stresses and challenges that students face + Valuing students' opinions
Consider and accommodate other demands in our lives (7%)	+ Having more class time to complete homework + Having reasonable expectations of students for school, home and extracurricular demands + Being mindful of students' commitments when assigning homework
Improve communication with students (5%)	+ Trying to relate more to students + Asking students for their opinions when change is needed + Providing positive reinforcement
Set us up for success in life (5%)	+ Providing students with opportunities for advanced learning + Providing support and guidance to understand post-secondary options + Encouraging students to be independent + Incorporating more life skills into classroom learning
Upgrade our classrooms and schools (4%)	+ Having more options + Using better computers, textbooks and equipment
Use a variety of evaluation methods (2%)	+ Placing more emphasis on assignments and projects + Decreasing the value of final exams + Assessing comprehension more regularly

* These themes are taken directly from student input and are listed in order of importance as ranked by students.

QUESTION FOUR: WHAT ACTIONS CAN STUDENTS TAKE TO IMPROVE HOW EDUCATION LOOKS AND FEELS?

The purpose of this question was to allow students to be creative and provide solutions or strategies that they can use to overcome the boundaries or obstacles identified in the second question (What is holding you back from learning at your best?). Students were asked to provide as many solutions as possible. The themes presented below are taken directly from input provided by students during the *Speak Out* forums; they include a breakdown of the number of the students who voted for each theme. Detailed information can be found in the subsequent table.



THEME	EXAMPLES OF THE STUDENT VOICE: STUDENT SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDENT ACTIONS *
Take the initiative and be responsible for my education (29%)	+ Asking for help + Coming to school prepared and ready to learn + Students who put in their best effort + Establishing strong work ethic + Leading and participating in discussions + Being committed to staying on topic Setting goals and priorities
Have a positive attitude (14%)	+ Coming to school with a positive mindset + Students who care about their education + Being motivated and determined to succeed + Not complaining + Not giving up + Not taking education for granted
Be respectful of others' learning needs (12%)	+ Not distracting others in class + Being considerate and co-operative + Being mature + Showing respect for different opinions
Manage my time effectively (9%)	+ Using time wisely + Preparing ahead of time for exams and quizzes + Limiting outside distractions + Staying organized + Balancing demands of school, work and personal life
Participate and get involved (9%)	+ Being more active in the school community + Participating in extracurricular activities + Volunteering in the community
Share my opinion and provide constructive feedback (9%)	+ Standing up and voicing opinions + "Speaking out" for what I believe in + Participating in school conferences + Discussing new ideas with teachers
Collaborate and learn from each other (6%)	+ Getting involved in positive class discussions + Asking for help and being willing to help others + Being open-minded and flexible about new ideas
Be an advocate for anti-bullying (4%)	+ Standing up for others + Respecting diversity in the classroom + Fostering a sense of belonging + Treating people the way they want to be treated
Pay attention and be respectful toward teachers (4%)	+ Listening in class + Showing respect for teachers + Behaving and being mature in class
Take care of my health (4%)	+ Getting the right amount of sleep + Having a healthy diet + Staying active

* These themes are taken directly from student input and are listed in order of importance as ranked by students.

The *Speak Out* team understands the importance of being open and transparent in this process. Within days of receiving the data from each *Speak Out* forum, the student-generated data was transcribed into a What We Heard report and posted on the *Speak Out* website. The report was also sent to the forum host, all forum participants and the school administration.

APPENDIX *SPEAK OUT* FORUM SCHEDULE

April 5, 2011 + Cochrane + Bow Valley High School
Rocky View School Division No. 41

April 14, 2011 + Lloydminster + Bishop Lloyd Middle School
Lloydminster Public School Division No. 99

April 17, 2011 + Edmonton + J. Percy Page School
Edmonton School District No. 7

April 19, 2011 + Legal + Legal School
Greater St. Albert Catholic Regional Division No. 29

April 21, 2011 + Lloydminster + Bishop Lloyd Middle School
Lloydminster Public School Division No. 99

May 5, 2011 + Ponoka + Ponoka Composite High School
Wolf Creek School Division No. 72

May 6, 2011 + Leduc + Leduc Composite High School
Black Gold Regional Division No. 18

May 10, 2011 + Redwater + Redwater School
Sturgeon School Division No. 24

May 11, 2011 + Rocky Mountain House + West Central High School
Wild Rose School Division

May 13, 2011 + Calgary + Edge School for Athletes
Rocky View School Division No. 41

May 19, 2011 + Edson + Holy Redeemer Catholic High School
Living Waters Regional Catholic School Division No. 42

May 19, 2011 + Tilley + Tilley School
Grasslands Regional Division No. 6

June 1, 2011 + Calgary + Calgary Academy

June 10, 2011 + Grande Prairie + Crystal Park School
Grande Prairie Public School District

June 13, 2011 + Calgary + St. Elizabeth Seton School
Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School District No. 1

September 24, 2011 + Edmonton
+ 2011-2012 Minister's Student Advisory Council
N/A

October 6, 2011 + Medicine Hat + Medicine Hat High School
Medicine Hat School District No. 76

October 18, 2011 + Grimshaw + Grimshaw Junior Senior High School
Peace River School Division No. 10

October 19, 2011 + Sexsmith + St. Mary's Catholic High School
Grande Prairie Roman Catholic Separate School District No. 28

November 1, 2011 + Calgary + Western Canada High School
Calgary School District No. 19

November 3, 2011 + Kinuso + Kinuso School
High Prairie School Division No. 48

November 16, 2011 + Airdrie + George McDougall High School
Rocky View School District No. 41

November 16, 2011 + Edmonton + Ross Sheppard High School
Edmonton School District No. 7

November 16, 2011 + Hanna + J.C. Charyk School
Prairie Land Regional Division No. 25

November 18, 2011 + Bashaw + Bashaw School
Battle River School Division No. 31

November 22, 2011 + Calgary + William Aberhart High School
Calgary School District No. 19

November 22, 2011 + Lethbridge + Chinook High School
Lethbridge School District No. 51

November 22, 2011 + Rocky Mountain House
+ West Central High School
Wild Rose School Division No. 66

November 24, 2011 + Jasper + École Desrochers
and Jasper Jr./Sr. High School
Greater North Central Francophone Education Region No. 2

November 24, 2011 + Stettler + William E. Hay
Composite High School
Clearview School Division No. 71

November 25, 2011 + Edmonton + St. Francis Xavier
Edmonton Catholic Separate School District No. 7

November 29, 2011 + Sherwood Park + Salisbury
Composite High School
Elk Island Public Schools No. 14

November 29, 2011 + Stony Plain + Stony Plain Memorial
Composite High School
Parkland School Division No. 70

December 5, 2011 + Spruce Grove + Spruce Grove
Composite High School
Parkland School Division No. 70

December 8, 2011 + Calgary + Juno Beach Academy
of Canadian Studies
Calgary School District No. 19

December 13, 2011 + Ardrossan + Ardrossan
Junior Senior High
Elk Island Public Schools Regional Division No. 14

December 13, 2011 + Fort McMurray + Father Patrick Mercredi Community High School
Fort McMurray Roman Catholic Separate School District No. 32

December 14, 2011 + High Level + High Level Public School
Fort Vermilion School Division No. 52

December 22, 2011 + Lethbridge + Catholic Central High School
Holy Spirit Roman Catholic Separate Regional Division No. 4

March 13, 2012 + Coalhurst + Coalhurst High School
Palliser Regional School Division No. 26

March 13, 2012 + Iron Springs + Huntsville School
Palliser Regional School Division No. 26

March 13, 2012 + Nobleford + Noble Central School
Palliser Regional School Division No. 26

March 13, 2012 + Picture Butte + Picture Butte High School
Palliser Regional School Division No. 26

March 14, 2012 + Brant + Brant Christian School
Palliser Regional School Division No. 26

March 14, 2012 + Carmengay + Carmengay Outreach School
Palliser Regional School Division No. 26

March 14, 2012 + Champion + Champion School
Palliser Regional School Division No. 26

March 14, 2012 + Vulcan + County Central High School
Palliser Regional School Division No. 26

March 15, 2012 + Arrowwood + Arrowwood School
Palliser Regional School Division No. 26

March 15, 2012 + Coaldale + Kate Andrews High School
Palliser Regional School Division No. 26

March 15, 2012 + Coaldale + Kate Andrews High School
Palliser Regional School Division No. 26

March 15, 2012 + Milo + Milo Community School
Palliser Regional School Division No. 26

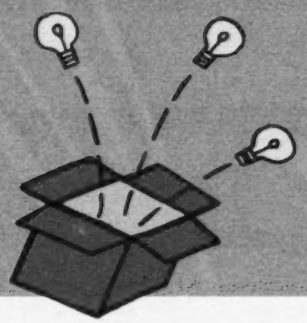
March 19, 2012 + Calgary + Calgary Christian School
Palliser Regional School Division No. 26

March 19, 2012 + Calgary + Heritage Christian Academy
Palliser Regional School Division No. 26

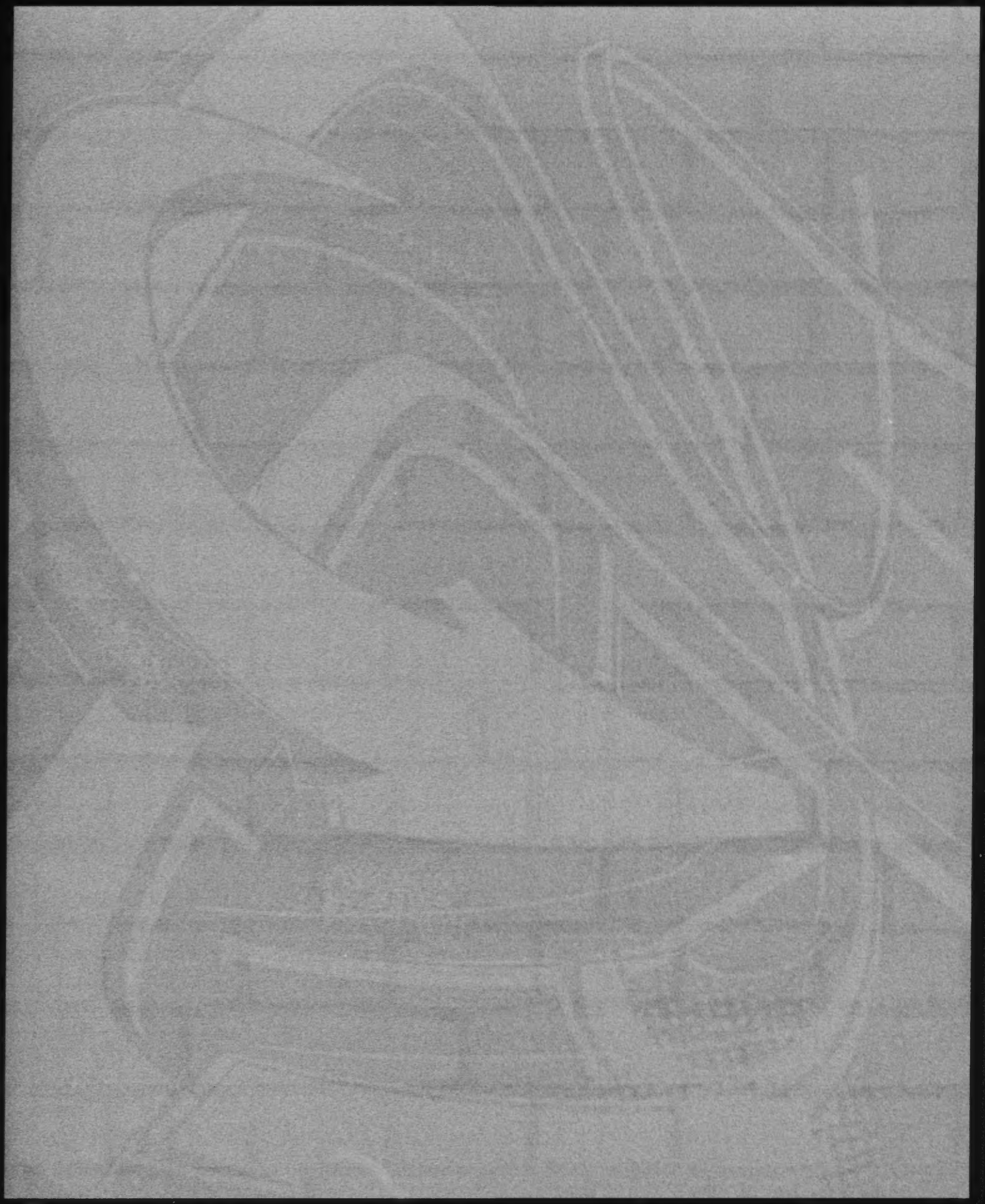
March 19, 2012 + Calgary + Menno Simons Christian School
Palliser Regional School Division No. 26

March 20, 2012 + Calgary + Master's College
Palliser Regional School Division No. 26

March 20, 2012 + Calgary + Glenmore Christian Academy
Palliser Regional School Division No. 26



4th ANNUAL *SPEAK OUT* CONFERENCE



4th ANNUAL *SPEAK OUT* CONFERENCE

On April 13–15, 2012, students ages 14 to 19, along with their chaperones, gathered from all areas of Alberta for the fourth Annual *Speak Out* Conference in Edmonton. Hosted by the Minister's Student Advisory Council (the Council), the *Speak Out* Conference gave students and their chaperones a chance to explore and provide input on key issues and initiatives related to the province's education system and to connect with Alberta Education representatives and other students with similar interests and aspirations. The three-day event provided delegates with an abundance of mentorship, workshops and networking opportunities. Highlights from the weekend's comprehensive program included:

- **Inspiring and entertaining keynote speeches**
- **A series of engaging breakout workshops for both students and chaperones**
- **Dozens of networking opportunities for both students and chaperones**
- **Live musical performances and a hip hop demonstration by local, talented artists**
- **An energetic dance party**

A total of 245 students and 103 chaperones from 54 communities around Alberta, as well as 55 Alberta Education staff, participated in the conference.

The fifth Annual *Speak Out* Conference is scheduled for April 12–14, 2013, in Edmonton. Watch the *Speak Out* website for more details.

> ***"This year's conference was the best ever! I met so many amazing people! I thought the council kids were amazing hosts and it was pretty cool to talk to all the Alberta Education staff! Thank you Speak Out!"*** [1]

1 All quotations from participants' contributions to *Speak Out* are shown as originally written, with no changes to spelling, grammar or punctuation.

Please see Appendices A–D for conference agendas and session descriptions.

WHO ATTENDED?

An extensive effort was made to promote the fourth Annual *Speak Out* Conference to all junior high and high school students and jurisdictions across Alberta. We were overwhelmed with applications, and as with all *Speak Out* events, it was important to ensure that a diverse student population was represented at the conference, including a cross-section of students ages 14 to 19, with varied academic goals, personal interests, abilities and opinions. All students who did not make the 2012 application cut-off are encouraged to apply again for the fifth Annual *Speak Out* Conference in April 2013. The online application will be available October 1, 2012.

WHERE THEY CAME FROM

- Airdrie
- Alhambra
- Ardrossan
- Bassano
- Beiseker
- Bowden
- Brooks
- Calgary
- Camrose
- Canmore
- Cardiff
- Cayley
- Cochrane
- Cold Lake
- Condor
- Drayton Valley
- Duchess
- Eckville
- Edmonton
- Edson
- Entwistle
- Evansburg
- Falher
- Fort Saskatchewan
- Fox Creek
- Gainford
- Gibbons
- Grande Cache
- Hanna
- Hays
- High Level
- Jasper
- Leduc
- La Crete
- Lamont
- Leslieville
- Lethbridge
- Medicine Hat
- Okotoks
- Olds
- Pincher Creek
- Ponoka
- Red Deer
- Red Earth Creek
- Redwater
- Rimbey
- Rocky Mountain House
- Sherwood Park
- Spruce Grove
- St. Albert
- Star
- Stauffer
- Stirling
- St. Isidore
- Taber
- Tilley
- Vauxhall
- Vulcan
- Youngstown

WHAT HAPPENED?

DAY ONE

On the first day, conference delegates arrived throughout the day, some having travelled for as long as nine hours. As they registered for the conference, delegates were greeted by the friendly faces of our Council. Friday evening, the conference was officially kicked off with an outstanding musical performance by the Command Sisters and welcoming remarks by the Deputy Minister of Education. Delegates then enjoyed dinner and an inspirational keynote presentation by Joel Hilchey, leadership expert, founder of The Beanstalk Project and teacher at McMaster University. The theme of Hilchey's presentation was "Taking intelligent risks," and it incorporated loaded mousetraps and the help of some brave student volunteers!

> ***"True student engagement is a new concept for many educators, and even though we are doing a lot of innovative work in this area, we are also learning how we can do this work more creatively and effectively. We know that Alberta's youth must have a voice at the table about decisions that affect their learning and their futures." – Deputy Minister of Education April 13, 2012, Fourth Annual Speak Out Conference***

DAY TWO

Saturday began with another keynote presentation by Joel Hilchey. The presentation, based on Hilchey and co-author Sebastian Jaster's book, *The Time to Climb*—a light and creative take on the classic story *Jack and the Beanstalk*—was intended to encourage the student audience to be confident in their own choices in life and take intelligent chances. Throughout the remainder of the morning and into the afternoon, delegates participated in four self-selected workshops. For students, there were five concurrent workshops in each time-slot, and there were nine workshop themes to choose from in total. The conference also included concurrent workshops designed specifically for chaperones. That evening, conference delegates enjoyed a musical performance by Kayla Patrick, a hip hop demonstration by the Shadow Twins and a dance party with DJ Kwake of Urban Metropolis.

DAY THREE

On Sunday, while chaperones took part in their last workshop of the weekend, students participated in *The Journey to Inclusion: High School*, hosted by Joy Malloch of Alberta Education's Inclusive Education department. Staged to resemble a talk show, the workshop encouraged students to think collectively about what diversity can look like and just how complex it can be. The workshop concluded by asking students to make note of the things that make them feel like they belong, and what they can do differently to ensure everyone, from every walk of life, feels welcome. The conference ended with closing remarks and a presentation filled with memorable images collected throughout the conference.

> ***"This was a great opportunity to have my voice heard. I met a lot of great people and had a great time!"***

Please see Appendices A–D for conference agendas and session descriptions.

WHAT **WE HEARD**

Before the conference, the *Speak Out* team worked closely with Alberta Education staff and the members of the Council to develop nine workshops for students and five workshops for chaperones. The workshop themes were chosen based on student feedback collected by *Speak Out* through the website, the forums and the Council over the past year. Below is a summary of what we heard during each workshop. For more detailed summaries, please see the complete What We Heard reports on the *Speak Out* website.

> ***"The whole experience of coming to the conference have really helped me to get my voice out and get past my shyness a bit. So I really enjoyed that."***

STUDENT WORKSHOPS

HEALTHY STUDENTS / HEALTHY SCHOOLS

The Healthy Students / Healthy Schools workshop explored three priorities that schools' physical education should focus on: physical activity, healthy eating and positive social environment. Creating healthy school environments and curriculum that focuses on the attitudes, skills and knowledge for a healthy, active lifestyle will support students in making healthy choices. Health needs to be tied to daily life, and students need to be involved and interested in it —they must develop their own healthy lifestyles.

Students provided input on how Alberta Education can promote wellness in schools by responding to the following questions:

+ Who has influenced you the most to lead a healthy lifestyle and why?
+ What is the best way for students to learn how to develop lifelong healthy behaviours?
+ How might health and physical education programs be delivered in schools so all students develop healthy lifelong behaviours?
+ Would it be valuable to have a nurse in your school? Why or why not?

A theme analysis of the responses revealed that in general, healthy students feel healthy inside and out, have the confidence to succeed, have the support to make healthy choices and have the attitude, skills and knowledge to be successful after high school. Other key findings are as follows:

+ Lifestyle choices start in the home. Students learn from parents first; if parents are overweight and avoid physical activity, their children may think this is an acceptable lifestyle that they should also follow. Today's parents need to be committed to their own healthy living and work with their children to live healthy lifestyles.

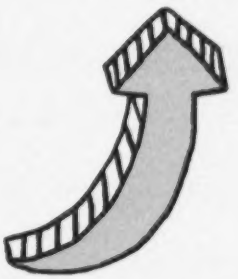
+ Healthy behaviours need to be a focus of learning from children's first day of Kindergarten through to the end of their school years. While healthy habits begin at home, the school's healthy learning environment will also influence the development of healthy habits.

+ Students need to understand what is and what is not healthy, but more importantly, they need to be willing to research what really is best for them and make their own healthy choices. Teaching topics and content that are "real life" and relevant to students' needs is also essential. By combining guidance from parents and teachers with their own informed decisions, students are more likely to build healthy living habits.

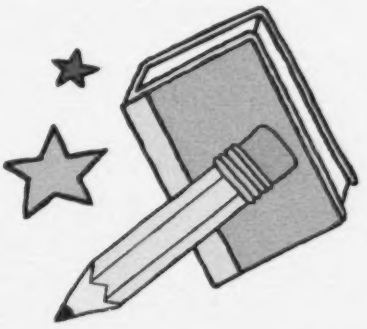
IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDENT VOICE

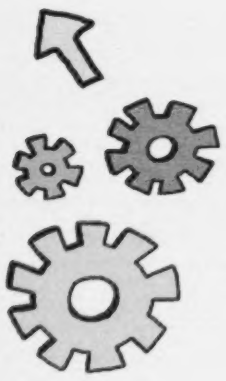
The student voice gathered in the Healthy Students / Healthy Schools workshop will be used to inform the development of wellness-related programs of study and models for delivering wellness in high schools using a comprehensive school health approach that supports:

+ Cross-curricular links to wellness
+ Changes to social and physical environments to support students in making healthy choices related to healthy eating, physical activity and positive social environments



> ***"All the wonderful and creative ways to promote a healthy lifestyle within the school and individuals are very important and I appreciate it."***





CHAOS OR CALM: YOUR CHOICE

Students' responses to the subject of career planning indicated they overwhelmingly believe that career planning is important at the current stage in their lives and that it is valuable in preparing them for the transition to life after high school. Even more promising was the student response to the question: 'Who is responsible for guiding your career planning? Students indicated that they held a "great deal" of personal responsibility for guiding their career planning. This was much more responsibility than they ascribed to home, school or the community. Finally, the trend toward having a career plan as students got older was positive. By Grade 12, 94 per cent of respondents either had a plan or were weighing a few specific options. In contrast, only 65 per cent of Grade 9 students responded similarly.

Despite the strong interest in career planning among students, there seems to be a disconnect between the enthusiasm students express for career planning and their perceptions of the services offered to them. Responses about the helpfulness of the services and resources available tended to range from neutral to negative. When students were asked how helpful 21 different services and resources have been, they responded positively only to three: the Internet, parents and other significant adults. Some of the negative responses might have to do with a lack of awareness of the services available.

Moreover, students expressed a significant sense of dissatisfaction with how the CALM course was presented. They felt the course should be offered on an in-class basis only rather than online. Further, students expressed that the course should be more engaging and should do a better job of providing them with career awareness via speakers, workshops, self-assessment and the matching of skills, abilities and aptitudes to specific career streams. Students said they were feeling stress or anxiety about upcoming career decisions.

Teaching students the skills to manage their own career planning is critical. The students' responses displayed a sense of individualism—for example, there were proposals for an alternative name for CALM, with entries like YOU (Your Own Universe). The significant challenge at hand will now be to align the delivery of tools and resources in a way that resonates with the students' passions, career interests and sense of personal responsibility.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDENT VOICE

The feedback captured in this workshop will act as the student voice component of a multifaceted research report co-ordinated by Alberta Education that will examine the state of career development and financial literacy in schools across Alberta. Ultimately, the feedback will be used to inform the direction of new wellness-related curriculum development models around career development and financial literacy.

> ***"The career stories section was really nice. It's reassuring to see that everyone has a different path. :)"***

BRING YOUR OWN TECHNOLOGY: OPTIMIZE YOUR LEARNING

This workshop aimed to find out how increasingly popular technology could be leveraged for education purposes. Students provided input on how they currently use personally owned devices (PODs) at school, for learning purposes and otherwise, and how PODs could be used to enhance and facilitate learning:

PODs could be used in many ways to personalize, facilitate and enhance students' learning experience. Technologies such as laptops, tablets and smartphones are widely adopted, and many students already own and use PODs outside of school. There is a significant opportunity to adopt PODs as mainstream learning tools inside and outside the classroom. Students' current use of PODs at school or in the classroom varies greatly. Some students use PODs to do all their assignments and interact with their classmates and teachers. Other students' use of PODs is minimal.

Many students who currently use PODs in the classroom and at school use them for typing notes, writing assignments, conducting Internet research and communicating with classmates. Students are increasingly using smartphone and tablet applications (apps) as quick reference tools. Some students use PODs to access course information, upload assignments to online portals, accommodate their special learning needs and use specialized programs, among other purposes.

The many entertainment and social networking opportunities that PODs offer may be a distraction and temptation for many students. Using PODs at school for non-educational purposes may undermine students' learning. For this reason, some schools discourage or forbid the use of PODs at school or in the classroom.

The integration of PODs as commonplace learning tools at school and in the classroom will require the establishment of effective policies and practices and a high level of trust between students and educators to encourage students to use PODs responsibly.

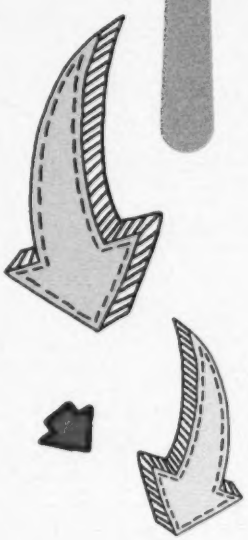
IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDENT VOICE

The Alberta Education School Technology Sector team will use the student feedback collected during this session in meetings and discussions with a number of internal and external stakeholders. The objective is to share students' perspective and reinforce the benefits of technology in the classroom. To date, the School Technology Sector has already shared the student voice in a number of presentations, including one to the POD community and practice group and one to a group of technology representatives from various school jurisdictions in Alberta.

> ***"I believe that the use of technology is very helpful in school, and I am excited to see the technology further advance."***

DEMYSTIFYING DIPLOMA EXAMS

Students participating in the Demystifying Diploma Exams workshop had mixed views on diploma exams. They agreed there are benefits to having diploma exams in Alberta: the exams are marked fairly and equitably across the province; they prepare students for the future by having them deal with stress, which everyone will face in the "real world," and high-stakes tests similar to what they will face if they attend post-secondary; and they hold teachers to a high standard and help maintain Alberta's strong reputation in education, which gives students an advantage when applying for post-secondary education.



However, students also agreed that there are drawbacks to diploma exams and that some of the same benefits could be achieved while making changes to the exams and the way they are administered. The most widely voiced drawback to diploma exams was the sheer amount of stress they put on students. Much of the stress is due to the fact that the exams are worth 50 per cent of a student's final grade. This is a high percentage given the relatively short amount of time students have to prepare for and write the exam compared to the months of work they have put in throughout the year to achieve the other 50 per cent of their final grade. In general, students fear the possible negative impact of having "one bad day" on the day of their exam.

Another criticism students had about diploma exams was that the written format of the exams limits what they can test. As one student put it, "Diploma exams can only test content-based learning, so strengths in teamwork, leadership, creativity, etc. are hard to evaluate in this format."

Several students proposed replacing some of the weighting on diploma exams with standardized unit tests or modular exams throughout the school year. Assuming these modular exams would each have weightings of much lower than 50 per cent, they would reduce the amount of stress students feel while testing the same content. They would also ensure teachers maintained pace with the curriculum, thereby lowering the probability that a teacher would miss covering some of the diploma exam content during the year. However, it was acknowledged that there were drawbacks to this proposal as well—notably that modular exams would not prepare students for future stress and high-stakes exams as well as the 50 per cent diploma exams do, and that the cost of administering multiple standardized tests throughout the year would be significantly higher.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDENT VOICE

The student input collected during the Demystifying Diploma Exams workshops forms part of our understanding of how the current diploma examination system is perceived and what students' ideal system would look like. Through various internal meetings and conversations, the input informs representatives in the diploma examination assessment sector, who might be looking down the road at potentially changing diploma weightings and other issues related to the examination system.

> ***"I was very worried and confused about diplomas and as to why they were worth so high but now I completely understand. In fact I'm glad they're 50%."***

ALBERTA GLOBALLY ENGAGED: SPEAKING OUT ON INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

In order to identify how students felt about international education, they were asked to participate in an activity that represented the interaction of two different cultures, followed by a discussion on how the activity related to their education and what international education experiences they have had in their schooling. Although students' experiences varied significantly, the one common theme was that they felt it was important to go further than just learning about other countries, cultures and religions in social studies or religious studies. Some students were receiving more exposure than others in terms of cultural interaction, mainly on a school-by-school basis. Students felt there should be some consistency in international education programming on a province-wide level, with direction (and possibly funds) coming from Alberta Education.

The following are examples of events and activities that students said are already happening in their schools:

- **"Heritage Days" types of events where different cultures are showcased in the school**
- **Fundraisers for other countries**
- **Pen pal programs with students in other countries**
- **Sponsor-a-Student programs**
- **School trips to places like Europe and China**
- **Student exchange programs (both students from another country staying with Alberta families and Alberta students staying with a families in other countries)**

Even with these types of events happening, students said the cultural assimilation game played at the beginning of the workshop showed them they are not as prepared as they would like to be when interacting with new cultures for the first time. Most students felt uncomfortable during the game because they didn't know what to expect from the other group. Many students mentioned a need for their education to teach them about other cultures and how to interact with new people from cultures they may not understand.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDENT VOICE

Feedback collected from this workshop will act as the student voice informing the future work of Alberta Education's International Education Services branch. This branch is dedicated to promoting international education opportunities for students and ensuring that education programming includes international content.

The student feedback may also be used by other Alberta Education branches in identifying connections between international education and the Ministry's recognized competencies. It will also be used to help with Alberta Education's promotional and communications plan around international education because the feedback provides useful indicators of where the promotional gaps might be, not just overseas, but across the province as well.

> ***"I think schools should make students more aware of cultural differences. Students also need to learn how to be accepting towards the cultures."***

SUCCESS THROUGH QUALITY TEACHING

Students all want similar things from a great teacher, and many of the qualities students look for are already reflected in the Teaching Quality Standard (the Standard), which guides today's teachers. But there are still problems with today's teaching system. For example, there are some teachers who:

- **Are not meeting the Standard**
- **Are not passionate about their jobs**
- **Judge students before getting to know them**
- **Teach using one instructional style**
- **Criticize when they should encourage**
- **Do things today that hinder students tomorrow**

The goal for this workshop was to identify ways to improve the Standard to make sure students of tomorrow have "perfect teachers" to look up to and learn from. But the school system is an ecosystem, and as in all ecosystems, its elements—such as supportive family and friends—must work in harmony for long-term success.

Students expressed that "good teachers make all the difference" and that "engagement in the classroom is a two-way street." Students and teachers both have to put in effort to make learning fun and engaging. Although a strong support system is important, students themselves must be committed to the challenge and be willing to engage at every level in their educational experience.

Another aspect of teacher quality is teacher training. Classrooms today have far more diversity and challenges than classrooms did even 10 years ago, and what makes a great classroom is different based on the diverse needs of each specific class. Today's university system has to provide teachers in training with the right toolkit to recognize the challenges described in this report and know how to solve them. Beyond understanding that every action they take today impacts students tomorrow, teachers have to be trained to identify struggling students quickly and create a teaching plan to engage and transform those students.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDENT VOICE

The input collected from this workshop will reinforce the What We've Heard From Students section during the review of the Standard; it reaffirms the importance of feedback students have provided to Alberta Education around student-teacher relationships and why those relationships are important to them. Through the review of the Standard, the student voice will be shared in upcoming meetings with parents, teachers, students, administrative staff, and other internal and external stakeholders.

> ***"BEST SESSION!!! It was a great way to end the day! Talking about great things teachers DO. This session gets a A++!!"***

THE ATTENDANCE BOARD: IT'S A GAME?

Collectively, students were eager to share their ideas about how the Attendance Board may be improved. A common and unchallenged theme was that the Attendance Board is a necessary evil. Students felt the best way to improve the Attendance Board is to have fewer students requiring the Attendance Board. Discussion in the workshop therefore focused on ways to reduce the number of students having hearings with the Attendance Board.

Students considered what could be done differently to remove barriers to attendance and reduce instances of truancy. There were two major themes in their responses. Firstly, students recommended a proactive strategy to intervene in cases of truancy. One student said it is strange that there is a fixed threshold of 20 per cent truancy at which cases are referred to the Attendance Board. The student made the point that some sort of intervention ought to happen before this level. Secondly, students emphasized that flexibility could pre-empt attendance problems; they recommended both flexibility in scheduling, particularly in the morning, and flexibility in transportation for buses and cold-weather walking provisions. They also suggested that if there were a way to bring education to the student, rather than bring the student to education, there would be considerably less truancy.

Finally, students focused on positive ways to create an environment where students want to go to school: innovative teaching, technology in the classroom, passionate teachers, extracurricular activities and incentives.

The core elements that stemmed from the open-ended questions and how they relate to each other are summarized below:

HOW CAN WE MAKE THE ATTENDANCE BOARD BETTER?

Use it less by addressing the root cause of truancy.

WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO DIFFERENTLY?

Pre-empt attendance problems:

- Introduce a graduated system with progressive consequences as students move from five per cent truancy onwards, rather than beginning at 20 per cent truancy

Take a more innovative approach:

- Involve students' peers in each area of attendance, from encouragement in the beginning to the jury or panel during review
- Promote student health and well-being
- Offer flexibility in scheduling and transportation:
  - Cold-weather walking management
  - Transportation items such as busing
  - Taking into account that teenagers' sleep schedules don't lend themselves to early start times in the morning

HOW SHOULD WE DEAL WITH THE STUDENTS WHO ARE NOT ENGAGED IN SCHOOL AND WHO ARE NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL?

Make them less inclined to avoid school:

- Innovation
- Technology
- Passionate teachers
- Extracurricular activities
- Incentives

IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDENT VOICE

The data collected during this workshop will, in varying ways, lead to improvements in how the Attendance Board operates and will help identify areas that require change, ultimately to help students become more engaged and attend school on a regular basis. For example:

- The data will help improve the overall communication and education activities of the Attendance Board.
- The data (student comments such as "All parties should approach trial with a positive, optimistic attitude —not treat the student as delinquent: trust them," "Make students part of generating solutions—let them take charge" and "Incentives instead of consequences") will provide insight into what students think and will benefit the Attendance Board as it fulfils its responsibilities.
- Students' comments on innovation ("Adjust schedules to fit students' needs") and intervention ("Counsellors being an active part of students' lives" and "Community engagement programs") will give direction to begin exploring these opportunities.

BULLYING PREVENTION

During this workshop, student feedback was collected on what strategies work well to address bullying, what kinds of bullying students still experience or witness in their schools and communities, and what could be done to put an end to bullying and prevent it from occurring in the future:

+ Bullying continues to occur in Alberta's schools and classrooms. Students reported experiencing and witnessing many forms of bullying, including physical and emotional bullying, implicit hurtful remarks, in-person confrontations and bullying through electronic media.

+ Students recognized that often bullying can be subtle and covert. It can start as a joke that turns into bullying over time, or it can be initiated by someone who is considered to be a friend. They remarked that sometimes teachers are the initiators of bullying behaviour. Owing to the subtlety and gradual exacerbation of many forms of bullying, it is difficult to detect, and victims of bullying often question their need to reach out for help.

+ Students identified several strategies for preventing or putting an end to bullying. These include building kids' confidence in themselves and instilling in them a sense of respect for others beginning from a very young age; organizing school spirit events and providing adequate opportunities for students to participate in sports and other extracurricular activities; raising awareness of bullying and its consequences; fostering tolerance for people who may be different; providing support for victims of bullying, bullies and those who are at risk of being bullied or bullying others; and taking action to address bullying when it occurs.

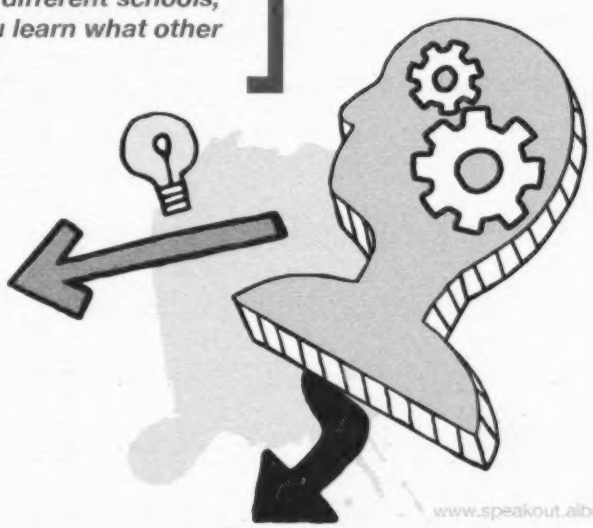
+ Ministries can take a number of actions to help prevent bullying in schools and communities. These include regularly making presentations at schools to help raise awareness of bullying and its consequences; providing training to teachers to help them recognize bullying and take appropriate action to address it; conducting research on bullying and sharing research findings with educators and students; supporting anti-bullying events and programs such as Pink Shirt Day, the Dare 2 Care Challenge Day, the Gay-Straight Alliance and the Yellow Ribbon Program; and increasing media coverage to raise awareness of bullying.

+ Students envisioned a school free from bullying as one that creates a fun learning environment and offers a wide variety of extracurricular activities to engage students in positive ways; organizes a wide variety of bullying prevention awareness and education activities; offers various counselling and support services for students experiencing challenges at school or at home; and enforces a zero-tolerance policy on bullying and administering severe punishment for bullies.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDENT VOICE

The information gathered in this workshop will be used as part of the student voice component of Alberta Education's new Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying Strategy. The strategy, expected to be finalized in September 2012, will help set the direction of the work that needs to be done to further address bullying among youth in Alberta. What was heard in the *Speak Out* Conference workshop supports feedback from other discussions and sources, including that of the Alberta Prevention of Bullying Youth Committee.

> ***I feel that a lot of people aren't aware about the different forms of bullying, and since we have lots of people from different schools, you see the viewpoint of a lot of people and you learn what other schools do to prevent bullying."***



Students enjoyed participating in this funding activity and said they learned a lot from the process. Most groups concluded that more funding needs to be put into the education system in order to provide more optional programming for students. Although school boards currently attempt to provide optional programming to meet the needs of the majority of students and the communities in which they reside, a minority of students are missing out on various opportunities because the school boards are unable to provide the desired variety of programming.

Although students said they would like to see more money in the system, some common themes emerged in discussions of how to improve programming given the current level of funding available. Many groups did end up prioritizing programming based on what would benefit the largest number of students, but others provided a wider variety of options by altering the delivery method of core courses. Many groups noted that finding more creative ways to deliver core programming allows more options to be presented to students, which gives them more incentive to stay in school and more options after high school.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDENT VOICE

Alberta Education's Business Operations and Stakeholder Support branch considers the student feedback collected during this workshop valuable to any planning and operations involving high school funding. It will be shared in various meetings with internal and external stakeholders, as well as play an important role in any decision making involving potential changes to the high school funding in the future.

In Alberta, a high percentage of the funding the province provides is flexible. School authorities prioritize their educational needs and allocate the funds from the province to best address their local situations. As a result, programming decisions are made at the school division level. Ideally, therefore, students who participated in this workshop will apply what they have learned, and what they have decided is important to them, by taking an active role in their own schools.

> ***"I love the way this session is run. You inform about the way funding is now, allow students the opportunity to see it in action, and remain open minded to any input from students."***

CHAPERONE WORKSHOPS

> ***"I liked the friendliness, and the casual atmosphere. Very well organized and I felt relieved that my daughter was safe and well accepted throughout the weekend." – Chaperone delegate***

NOW THAT WE HAVE COMPETENCIES – SO WHAT?

Throughout this workshop, it was clear that participants supported a competency-focused approach to learning. They felt that focusing more on competencies and skill development (as described in the *Framework for Student Learning: Competencies for Engaged Thinkers and Ethical Citizens With an Entrepreneurial Spirit)*, as well as giving students more freedom to choose how they wish to learn, would put students in a better position to actively engage in their learning and pursue a path of lifelong learning. This would translate to their being better able to effectively manage opportunities and challenges that arise both now and in the future. The main themes that arose out of participant dicussions are captured in the following comments:

+ "By developing the competencies, we are helping our students become lifelong learners. This means we can challenge them more and more, rather than less and less."
+ "By keeping the overall framework in mind, we have the potential to broaden the ways in which students are being taught."
+ "Emphasis should be placed on the process of finding an answer rather than just the answer itself."

IMPLEMENTATION OF CHAPERONE VOICE

Alberta Education's engagement with parents, guardians, teachers and other educators is one of many similar engagements with stakeholders on the framework. Department staff and stakeholders who work in the area of curriculum redesign will analyze information collected during this workshop, along with information collected from other stakeholder groups, and use it in key discussions. Within this area, the information will be used to help develop standards and guidelines for curriculum development and to inform ways to embed competency development within future programs of study.

> ***"Really glad I participated in this session. Very good reminder that students come from all walks of life and it is important to acknowledge and embrace that." – Chaperone delegate***

MAPPING YOUR CHILD'S FUTURE: EXPLORING A NEW DIGITAL PARENT RESOURCE

Alberta Education is committed to working with parents to ensure that they are informed about how to effectively engage in their children's education. One component of fulfilling this commitment has been to develop an online resource for parents, *My Child's Learning: A Parent Resource*. Parents and educators participating in this workshop received a tour of this resource. In general, the feedback from participants was that they appreciated learning about the resource and how to use it. It is now the responsibility of the Ministry, in conjunction with parents, to promote the benefits of using this resource to Alberta communities.

IMPLEMENTATION OF CHAPERONE VOICE

Information gathered during this workshop will be used to enhance the new digital resource, *My Child's Learning: A Parent Resource*, through continual revisions. Discussions with participating parents, teachers and other educators will help Alberta Education measure the value and the success of the tool. The participant feedback also informs the Ministry about other opportunities to promote awareness of the resource so more parents and guardians can continue to benefit from it and gain meaningful information about their children's education.

DIVERSITY IN ALBERTA SCHOOLS: WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

As Alberta's population becomes increasingly diverse, we must ensure we are able to meet the needs of all students. Students need opportunities to explore and understand diversity. During the workshop, participants confirmed that student learning is usually enhanced when they learn from and experience things for themselves. Learning about diversity is no exception.

To help facilitate conversations and action at a school and community level, participants can take what they learned in the workshop and engage students to think about diversity from a broader perspective. The school, home and community are key environments where students have the opportunity to develop a lifelong practice of including others.

IMPLEMENTATION OF CHAPERONE VOICE

Alberta Education will use the information gathered at the workshop to help measure the success of the collective practice to build an inclusive education system in Alberta.

The information will continue to educate various schools, parent councils and other community groups on what inclusive school communities look like. For example, school jurisdictions are developing information kits to further educate parent advisory councils about inclusive behaviours, techniques and practices. Parents can then use this information to engage their schools in similar conversations.

RESEARCH: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

The 21st-century student has challenged traditional models of teaching and learning. Various learning methods, as well as the pace at which different individuals learn, are being considered now more than ever. The development, dissemination and use of research to improve education will contribute to a forward-thinking and adaptive education system. Workshop participants were encouraged to take the tools and feedback learned during the workshop back to their schools to start new conversations around educational practices and approaches.

After finishing the workshop, participants showed a 51 per cent increase in awareness of how and where to access online educational research. Using this information will make them better able to contribute to evidence-based decision making in the classroom, the home and the community.

IMPLEMENTATION OF CHAPERONE VOICE

The information gathered during the *Research: From Theory to Practice* workshop will be used to inform internal and external stakeholders across Alberta about how readily parents, teachers and students can access evidence and research via the Internet, and then use it to make informed decisions about their school, education or child. The workshop feedback will reinforce the importance of what Alberta Education's School Research and Improvement branch is doing with its Education Research and Innovation Strategy.

> ***"I learned a lot re: research tools as well as smart technology. I thought the interactive formula with the different roles was neat and is something I will certainly try in my own classroom."***
> ***– Chaperone delegate***

HOW WE DID

At the end of each workshop, delegates were asked to complete an evaluation. Below are the averages from those evaluation results.

+ 96 per cent were glad they participated in their sessions.
+ 94 per cent liked the way their sessions were set up.
+ 93 per cent felt confident that their input during the session will be considered.
+ 92 per cent learned a lot in their sessions.
+ 91 per cent felt engaged in their sessions.

At the end of the conference, delegates were asked to complete an evaluation on the event as a whole. Below are some highlights from those evaluation results.

+ 97 per cent felt that overall, the conference was well organized.
+ 94 per cent were glad they participated in the conference.
+ 89 per cent felt the workshops were a great opportunity to share their ideas and perspectives.

"What a great opportunity for students! Also including the activities for chaperones was fantastic. The 'council' kids did so amazing leading sessions—well done!" – Chaperone delegate

APPENDIX A STUDENT AGENDA

FOURTH ANNUAL *SPEAK OUT* CONFERENCE | APRIL 13–15, 2012

FRIDAY, APRIL 13, 2012

3:00 pm - 6:00 pm	Conference Registration	Hotel Lobby
5:30 pm - 6:00 pm	Musical Performance by the Command Sisters	Robson Ballroom
6:00 pm - 6:15 pm	Welcoming Remarks	Robson Ballroom
6:15 pm	DINNER	Robson Ballroom
7:30 pm - 9:00 pm	Keynote Address - Joel Hilchey	Robson Ballroom

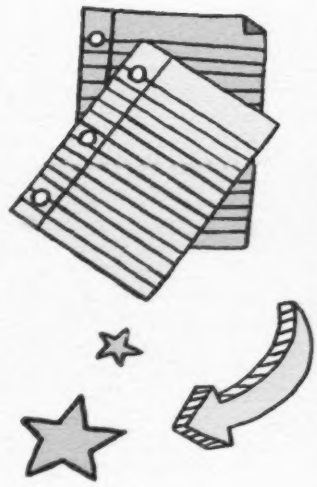
SATURDAY, APRIL 14, 2012

8:00 am	BREAKFAST	Robson Ballroom
9:00 am - 9:45 am	Keynote Workshop - Joel Hilchey	Robson Ballroom
9:45 am	HEALTH BREAK	Robson Ballroom
10:00 am	Healthy Students Healthy Schools / Chaos or Calm: Your Choice! / Bring Your Own Technology / Demystifying Diploma Exams / Alberta Society Engaged	Alpine Lakes Rooms
11:15 am	HEALTH BREAK	Robson Ballroom
11:30 am	Healthy Students Healthy Schools / Chaos or Calm: Your Choice! / Bring Your Own Technology / Demystifying Diploma Exams / Alberta Society Engaged	Alpine Lakes Rooms
12:45 pm	LUNCH / GALLERY WALK	Robson Ballroom
2:00 pm	Success Through Quality Teaching / The Attendance Board / Bullying Prevention / Demystifying Diploma Exams / High School Fiscal Fair	Alpine Lakes Rooms
3:15 pm	HEALTH BREAK	Robson Ballroom
3:30 pm	Success Through Quality Teaching / The Attendance Board / Bullying Prevention / Demystifying Diploma Exams / High School Fiscal Fair	Alpine Lakes Rooms
4:45 pm	FREE TIME	
5:30 pm - 6:00 pm	Musical Performance by Kayla Patrick	Robson Ballroom
6:00 pm	DINNER	Robson Ballroom
7:30 pm - 10:00 pm	Hip Hop Demonstration + Dance Party	Robson Ballroom

SUNDAY, APRIL 15, 2012

8:00 am	BREAKFAST	Robson Ballroom
9:00 am - 12:00 pm	The Journey to Inclusion: High School	Robson Ballroom
12:00 pm - 12:15 pm	Conference Closing Remarks	Robson Ballroom

APPENDIX B SESSION DESCRIPTIONS



STUDENTS

HEALTHY STUDENTS / HEALTHY SCHOOLS

Do you have great ideas about how to make school a healthier place? The Wellness Education and Healthy Schools team wants to hear what you have to say! Join this interactive workshop and tell us what you think students should study and experience in high school to develop healthy lifelong behaviours.

CHAOS OR CALM: YOUR CHOICE!

"What do you want to do when you grow up?" It's a question that only seems to get harder to answer the older you get. When you live in a world of countless possibilities, career planning can seem impossible. Alberta Education is redesigning the current Career and Life Management program, and we would love to hear what you have to say. Are you really prepared for life after high school? Do you have the tools you need to be successful once you graduate? Our goal is to provide students like you with a more purposeful preparation for life beyond the classroom, and we are asking for your input. After all, it's your future. Shouldn't you have a say in it?

BRING YOUR OWN TECHNOLOGY – OPTIMIZE YOUR LEARNING

Do you use your own technology to learn in school? Do you have ideas on how we can use technology to optimize your learning experience? Join this interactive session to explore questions and ideas about personally owned devices and how to personalize your learning.

DEMYSTIFYING DIPLOMA EXAMS

It's the most stressful time of the year! It doesn't help that the "D" word is so mystifying. Come and get the answers to your questions about the dreaded diplomas. With a splash of humour, we'll demystify diploma exams and help you prepare and manage the stress. This session uses real students and real diploma exam staff.

ALBERTA GLOBALLY ENGAGED: SPEAKING OUT ON INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

What are the benefits of international education? What are the challenges? This interactive session is an opportunity to discuss international education from Kindergarten to Grade 12. We'll talk about the positives and explore potential issues as well as create key messages to help raise awareness and promote the importance of being an active participant in the global community.

SUCCESS THROUGH QUALITY TEACHING

Do you have a story about a time you connected with a teacher? What was it that made the connection? Teachers are expected to engage students in meaningful and relevant work. In this session, you will have the opportunity to share stories about how quality teaching has positively impacted your learning. Through a variety of engaging activities, we will discuss competencies teachers need to help students become engaged, ethical and entrepreneurial citizens. Help decode GT = E^3S and find out why it is the formula for success!

THE ATTENDANCE BOARD: IT'S A GAME?

The Attendance Board helps students who are having problems attending school. But are we doing a good enough job? Do you have ideas about how we can encourage people to stay in school? In this fun and interactive session, you'll learn about, and give feedback on, the current policies and processes of the Attendance Board through a trivia game. As you play, you can share your experiences and knowledge on how we can encourage those who are not attending school to become engaged and enthusiastic about learning.

BULLYING PREVENTION

To stop bullying, government is developing the Prevention of Bullying Strategy. Please help us ensure this strategy is effective by sharing what you know about bullying in your community and in your school. Join this session and tell us what bullying looks like in your community, what's working to prevent bullying and how government can help keep school communities free from bullying.

HIGH SCHOOL FISCAL FUN

Are you wondering why you didn't get the course option you wanted? Do you think you could design a better high school program if you only had the chance? Now you have it! Come to our session and plan a high school program. You'll learn about the opportunities and challenges associated with high school funding, and get the opportunity to share and discuss issues and solutions

APPENDIX C CHAPERONE AGENDA

FOURTH ANNUAL *SPEAK OUT* CONFERENCE | APRIL 13–15, 2012

FRIDAY, APRIL 13, 2012

3:00 pm - 6:00 pm	Conference Registration	Hotel Lobby
5:30 pm - 6:00 pm	Musical Performance by the Command Sisters	Robson Ballroom
6:00 pm - 6:15 pm	Welcoming Remarks	Robson Ballroom
6:15 pm	DINNER	Robson Ballroom
7:30 pm - 9:00 pm	Keynote Address - Joel Hilchey	Robson Ballroom

SATURDAY, APRIL 14, 2012

8:00 am	BREAKFAST	Robson Ballroom
9:00 am - 9:45 am	Keynote Workshop - Joel Hilchey	Robson Ballroom
9:45 am	HEALTH BREAK	Robson Ballroom
10:00 am	Now That We Have Competencies - So What?	Garden Courtyard
11:15 am	HEALTH BREAK	Robson Ballroom
11:30 am	Walking Together: First Nations, Métis and Inuit Perspectives	Garden Courtyard
12:45 pm	LUNCH / GALLERY WALK	Robson Ballroom
2:00 pm	Mapping Your Child's Future: Exploring a New Digital Parent Resource	Garden Courtyard
3:15 pm	HEALTH BREAK	Robson Ballroom
3:30 pm	Diversity in Alberta Schools: What Can I Do to Help?	Garden Courtyard
4:45 pm	FREE TIME	
5:30 pm - 6:00 pm	Musical Performance by Kayla Patrick	Robson Ballroom
6:00 pm	DINNER	Robson Ballroom
7:30 pm - 10:00 pm	Hip Hop Demonstration + Dance Party	Robson Ballroom

SUNDAY, APRIL 15, 2012

8:00 am	BREAKFAST	Robson Ballroom
9:00 am	Research: From Theory to Practice	Garden Courtyard
10:15 am	HEALTH BREAK	Robson Ballroom
10:30 am	**Free Time**	
12:00 pm - 12:15 pm	Conference Closing Remarks	Robson Ballroom

APPENDIX D SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

CHAPERONES

NOW THAT WE HAVE COMPETENCIES – SO WHAT?

Join us to learn about the *Framework for Student Learning: Competencies for Ethical Citizens and Engaged Thinkers With an Entrepreneurial Spirit.* This student-led session includes lots of engaging and interactive activities and gives you an opportunity for input and discussion around the question "What does the framework mean for student learning in the future?"

WALKING TOGETHER: FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS AND INUIT PERSPECTIVES

How can we work toward achieving success for all students? How will the authentic infusion and understanding of First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives and teaching practices benefit all students? These questions will be examined through a tour of *Walking Together First Nations, Métis and Inuit Perspectives in Curriculum*, a resource for educators developed by Alberta Education. You will gain greater appreciation and understanding of First Nations, Métis and Inuit worldviews and the issues that surround these very diverse and rich cultures. The session will raise awareness of the benefits observed when engaging the community in the learning process, and of the need for students to be able to discover their own identities within their learning environment.

MAPPING YOUR CHILD'S FUTURE: EXPLORING A NEW DIGITAL PARENT RESOURCE

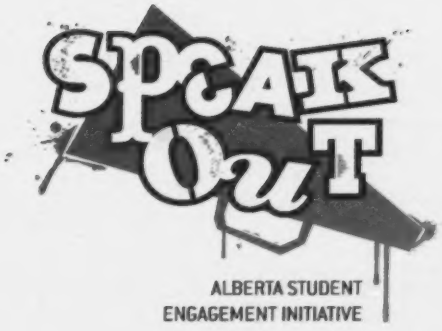
You want to be involved in your child's education. We want to help you do that with resources that work for you. Alberta Education is committed to working with parents to ensure they are more informed about how to effectively engage in their children's education. Join us to test drive and provide feedback on a new online tool that will ultimately lead to more focused and efficient communication with parents. This exciting new digital parent resource, available through the Alberta Education website, will provide parents with meaningful information about their children's education.

DIVERSITY IN ALBERTA SCHOOLS: WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

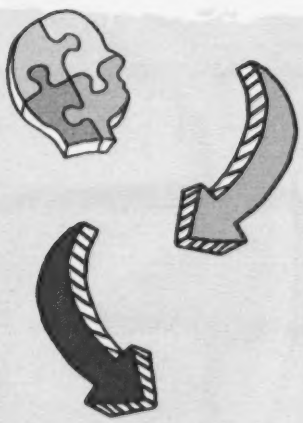
Explore diversity in Alberta schools. You'll consider the diverse student population in your child's school and hear from students about their experiences and what diversity brings to their schools and learning experiences. Share what diversity means to you and explore what parents and educators can do to support school communities in meeting the needs of all students.

RESEARCH: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

There is a wealth of information and research about education policy and practice. But how do you as adults (parents, educators, community members, policy makers, etc.) get and use this evidence to inform your decisions? Through information and a hands-on activity, this session will give you insight into the world of education and research. You'll gain a broader perspective through active engagement in topical scenarios.


SPEAK
OUT
ALBERTA STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

MINISTER'S STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL



MINISTER'S STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

The Minister's Student Advisory Council (the Council) explores ways to improve education in Alberta, and its members act as ambassadors of *Speak Out* within their schools and communities. Council members were selected based on the diversity of their backgrounds, opinions, perspectives and experiences, as described in their written application forms. The selection process involved reviewing those applications and conducting extensive telephone interviews. Alberta Education reviewed the short list of candidates, and final approval was granted by the Minister of Education.

WHO THEY ARE

The Council consists of 24 youths between the ages of 14 and 19. For selection purposes, the province is divided into geographical zones, ensuring broad provincial representation. Council members are appointed to serve a one-year term, starting in July of each year.

The Council has a growing body of strong alumni who continue to be passionate about sharing the student voice. Many alumni members were actively engaged with the Council and *Speak Out* throughout the year.

THEIR IMPACT

This year, the student voice was more sought-after than ever. Students are the largest and one of the most valued stakeholder groups in education; as a result, other stakeholders, including other Alberta Education program areas and other ministries within the Government of Alberta, are recognizing the importance of involving students in the development or improvement of their own projects and initiatives. These other stakeholder groups look to students for their thoughts on education.

To date, feedback has been gathered on such diverse topics as designing school buildings in the future, redesigning curriculum, encouraging fellow students to make healthy choices and understanding issues facing today's youth in Alberta. Along with wanting to learn from students, other program areas and education stakeholders aim to provide youth with opportunities to develop leadership skills, foster a connection with youth leaders and create face-to-face opportunities for sharing information.

Many program areas and education stakeholders have integrated student feedback into reports and recommendations that are being reviewed by key decision and policy makers from across the province. Feedback will be used to inform, and help shape the development of, various education programs and initiatives.

The Council was invited to participate in a variety of events in various roles throughout the year. Council members participated in small group and online discussions; presented information on youth perspectives through panel presentations; co-hosted major consultation sessions, including the *Our Children, Our Future: Getting It Right* public consultations; and sat as youth representatives on various provincial committees.

> ***"Allowing the (Council) student member to speak and present was very positive and beneficial to our presentation."*** [1]
> ***- Alberta Education staff member***

1 All quotations from participants' contributions to *Speak Out* are shown as originally written, with no changes to spelling, grammar or punctuation.

THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES

Throughout their term, Council members acted as ambassadors of *Speak Out*. Their responsibilities included the following:

- Participating in online discussions, polls, contests and surveys on the interactive *Speak Out* website, www.speakout.alberta.ca
- Hosting at least one *Speak Out* forum, using the DVD toolkit, in their school or elsewhere in their community
- Presenting the results of their *Speak Out* forum to the Minister of Education and local school authorities and decision makers
- Assisting with recruitment, hosting and facilitation at the fourth Annual *Speak Out* Conference.
- Participating in several Ministry meetings and provincial conferences, contributing their voices and perspectives
- Providing ongoing feedback on *Speak Out* initiatives, including the website, promotional products, recruitment strategies and advertising campaigns

The *Speak Out* team prepared Council members for success in these endeavours by providing orientation and training in leadership, public speaking, facilitation and media relations.

The Council took on a leadership role and met with key contacts and Ministry of Education stakeholders —including representatives from the Diploma Program and Attendance Board branches—during their 2011–2012 term. In addition to these meetings, members of the Council participated in the following important events and initiatives, providing a student voice:

> ***"After my Council term I am going to miss all the people I have met. It's inspiring to meet passionate, motivated people who all have different interests but are willing to dedicate time and effort to work together to solve problems that affect us all!"***

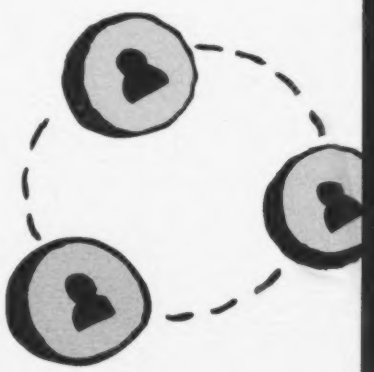
Schools for the Future Workshop – June 23, 2011
Students provided their thoughts on what they like about their current school buildings and their suggestions on designing school buildings in the future. The results gathered at the workshop will guide the continued review of education design standards for Alberta schools and the support provided to school jurisdictions when they are designing schools.

Youth Excel CLASP's Alberta Youth Health Knowledge Exchange Roundtable – September 19, 2011
Council members participated in group discussions with Ministry of Health stakeholders on ways to strengthen provincial knowledge exchange regarding youth health in Alberta.

Action on Curriculum Research Roundtable Discussion – September 29–30, 2011
Council members participated in a two-day event to discuss the future of curriculum in Alberta high schools. A report is being developed that incorporates the feedback from all participants. The students' input is an integral component of the feedback.

Action on Wellness International Symposium – October 10–13, 2011
Alberta Health and Wellness hosted delegates from all over the world. Council members sat on various panels to provide a youth perspective on a variety of health and wellness policies and practices, including marketing to children and ways to engage youth in decision making.

Curriculum Design for Informed Transformation: Creating a Great School for Every Student Invitational Symposium – November 4–5, 2011
Council members attended this event to represent the student voice on the development of guiding principles for future curriculum design.



Our Children, Our Future: Getting It Right Public Consultations – November 26–December 9, 2011
Council members co-hosted each of the seven public consultation sessions on the *Education Act* and shared their perspectives on what they heard during the session and what they learned throughout the day. Other Council members participated in table discussions and provided valuable student feedback. Input from the consultations was used to redraft the *Education Act*.

Our Children, Our Future: Getting It Right Student Consultations – November 24–December 13, 2011
Recognizing that students are the most important stakeholder in education, the *Speak Out* team hosted a series of forums for students that focused on, and enabled students to provide valuable input on, the new *Education Act*.

Third Annual Shaping the Future – Engaging Healthy School Communities Conference – January 26–28, 2012
Council members sat on a panel that discussed what it means to be a healthy student. Discussion topics included physical activity, healthy eating and mental well-being within schools and communities.

First Reading of the *Education Act* – February 14, 2012
The Minister of Education invited members of his Council to be present at the introduction of Bill 2 (*Education Act*) in the legislature.

Alberta's 2012 Culture Forum – February 24–25, 2012
Council members participated in discussions on issues related to youth in Alberta and learned more about their roles in shaping the future of the province's culture sector. Council members also had the opportunity to meet and discuss various topics with Premier Redford.

Rural Education Sustainability Symposium – March 2, 2012
Council members participated in breakout sessions where they shared their perspectives on education sustainability. They also addressed the larger group by providing input on what they heard during their sessions.

> ***"My most memorable event was the very first Alberta Ed. Meeting I went to as a Council member. It was the Inspiring Education discussion and I remember being very surprised at how eager all the adults were to listen to my opinion."***

Premier's Inaugural Youth Engagement Luncheon – March 14, 2012
Premier Redford hosted a luncheon to recognize youth who are engaged and making a difference in Alberta. Following the luncheon, students participated in a group discussion and provided feedback on the development of the social policy framework for Human Services.

Fourth Annual *Speak Out* Conference – April 13–15, 2012
Council members took an active role in planning and facilitating a number of breakout workshops for both students and chaperones. Please refer to the fourth Annual *Speak Out* Conference section on pages 31–52 for more details.

Alberta School Councils' Association Conference and Annual General Meeting – April 20–22, 2012
The Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA) invited Council members to sit on a student panel and share the student voice with parents and ASCA members. Students spoke about current issues concerning youth in Alberta.

> ***"This was a really wonderful opportunity and getting to work with some amazing students was a great experience." - Alberta Education staff member***

National Symposium for Child and Youth Mental Health – May 31–June 1, 2012
This symposium, held in Calgary, was organized by the National Infant, Child and Youth Mental Health Consortium, with the support of the Child Welfare League of Canada. Council members were part of the event's planning committee, and also hosted student sessions, to ensure youth participation at the event.

Speak Out Program Review – June 2, 2012
Council members provided detailed feedback on all four components of the *Speak Out* initiative: the *Speak Out* website, the fourth Annual *Speak Out* Conference, the *Speak Out* forums and the Council. Feedback received from the Council will be used to improve the *Speak Out* initiative.

2012 Canadian School Boards Association Congress – July 4–7, 2012
A member of the Council was invited to participate in the national congress and sit on a panel that included students from across Canada, hosted by CBC Television personality Mark Kelley. Each student spoke about his or her personal school experiences, including what is working, what is not working and what needs to change and how.

2011–2012 Curriculum Policy Advisory Committee (CPAC)
Members of the Council provided the student voice on the CPAC for the 2011–2012 term. This committee provides strategic advice to help ensure Alberta has an engaging curriculum that inspires every student every day.

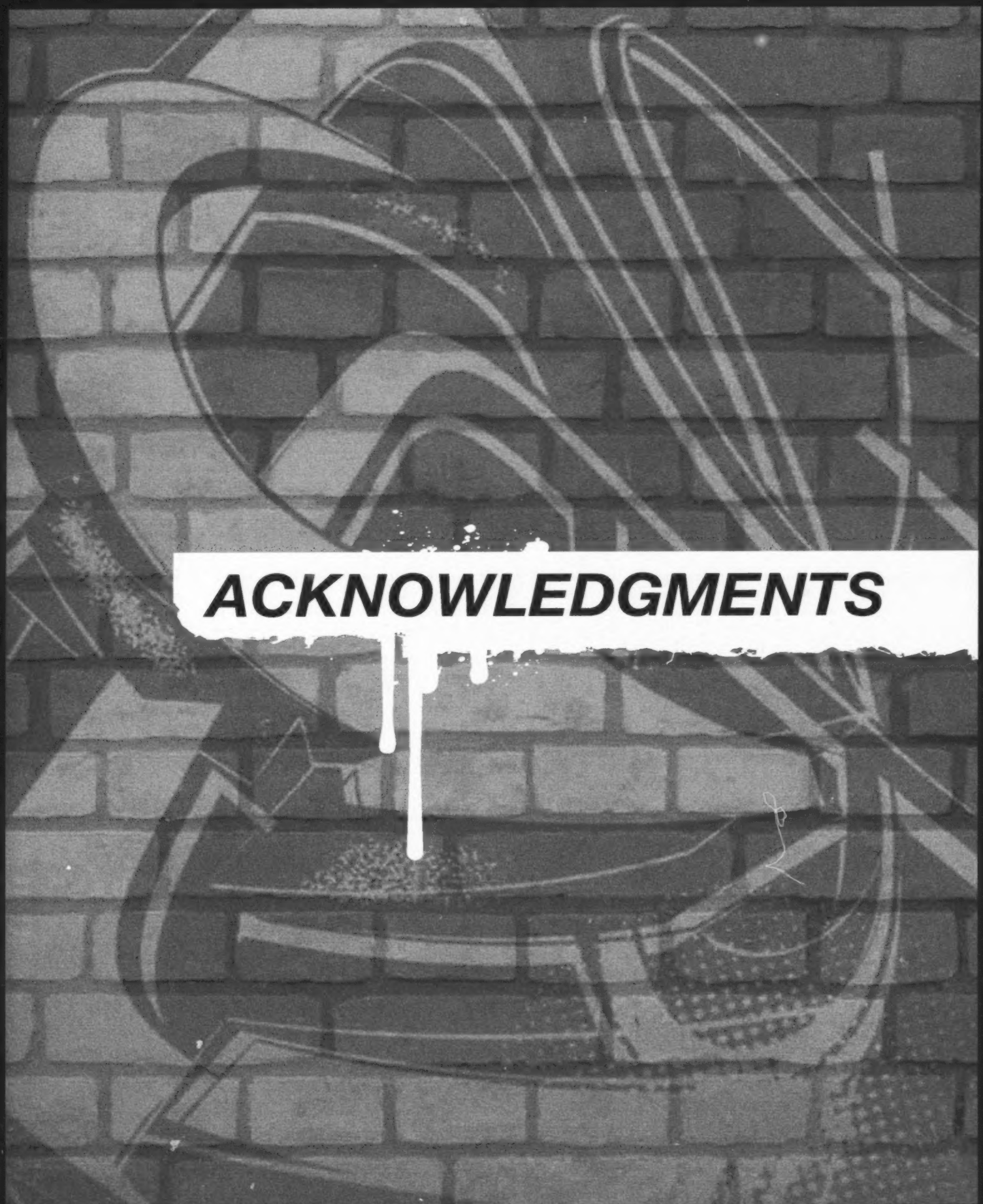
Speak Out is proud of every student who participated in the 2011–2012 Council. It is because of them, and their passion and dedication to improving education, that this year the student voice has been heard more than ever before in Alberta. Whether it was through direct engagement with the Minister of Education or simply having one-on-one discussions with peers, Council members have been strong ambassadors for what is most important to *Speak Out*: hearing what students have to say about their education and sharing their input with others in an effort to continually change and improve education in Alberta.

> ***"Education is such a precious privilege we have in Canada. The Council allows students to have a say in what they need to learn at their very best. Education in Alberta is some of the best around and the Council provides so many unique opportunities to the students so they can learn and grow to become more influential on improving education."***

2012–2013 MINISTER'S STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

The Council application process and selection is completed annually. All interested youth, including current Council members seeking renewal, are asked to submit an application. The members of the Council play a very important role in ensuring that the student voice continues to be sought and considered in Alberta.

> ***"The best part of being a Council member is sharing what I think about our education system and working with decision makers to help make a difference for generations to come."***



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The *Speak Out* team is thrilled with everything the initiative has accomplished this year. Achievements include an ever-growing website that allows Alberta's youth to interact and become further engaged in their education, numerous *Speak Out* forums giving students a platform to openly share their feelings about education, a successful conference attracting well over 300 delegates, and numerous opportunities for members of the Minister's Student Advisory Council (the Council) to *Speak Out*.

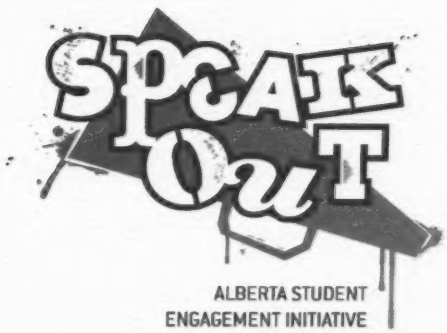
Speak Out's ability to connect with hundreds of students, as well as their parents/guardians and educators, and carry their messages forward to influence priority areas of Alberta's education system is a combined effort. *Speak Out* would like to acknowledge the following groups for their guidance and support:

+ The Alberta Premier's office
+ The Minister of Education's office
+ The Deputy Minister of Education's office
+ The People and Research Assistant Deputy Minister's office
+ Alberta Education's executive team, Legislative Services, Communications office and Student Engagement Committee

Speak Out also wants to recognize all the hard work of friends and partners from other areas of Alberta Education, as well as from other ministries. These groups have played an essential role in the ongoing development of the Student Engagement Initiative. Together, we can enhance Alberta's education system and, most importantly, the student experience.

+ Action on Inclusion
+ Business Operations and Stakeholder Support
+ Corporate Planning
+ Cross-Curriculum Infusion
+ Cross-Ministry Services
+ Citizenship and Career Pathways
+ Culture
+ Curriculum Standards and Stakeholder Engagement
+ Diploma Program
+ Environment and Sustainable Resource Development
+ First Nations, Métis and Inuit and Field Services
+ French Language Education Services
+ Health and Wellness
+ Human Resource Management
+ Human Services
+ International Education Services
+ IT Business Planning and Support
+ Learning Resource Centre
+ Operational Standards
+ Policy and Planning
+ Professional Standards
+ Program Delivery
+ School Accreditation and Disputes Resolution
+ School Research and Improvement
+ School Technology
+ Sciences and Wellness
+ Service Alberta
+ Strategic Planning
+ Tourism, Parks and Recreation

One group, in particular, influenced *Speak Out*'s success this year like no other could: the student group. Whether they are part of the Council or contribute via the website, forums or annual conference, the students and their input fuel the Student Engagement Initiative. Not only are Alberta's youth the reason the initiative exists but their voices highlight issues most important to Alberta Education's core demographic—those issues that most often become priority action items. The *Speak Out* team is thankful to these students for their dedication to education and their participation in numerous Alberta Education projects and events.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